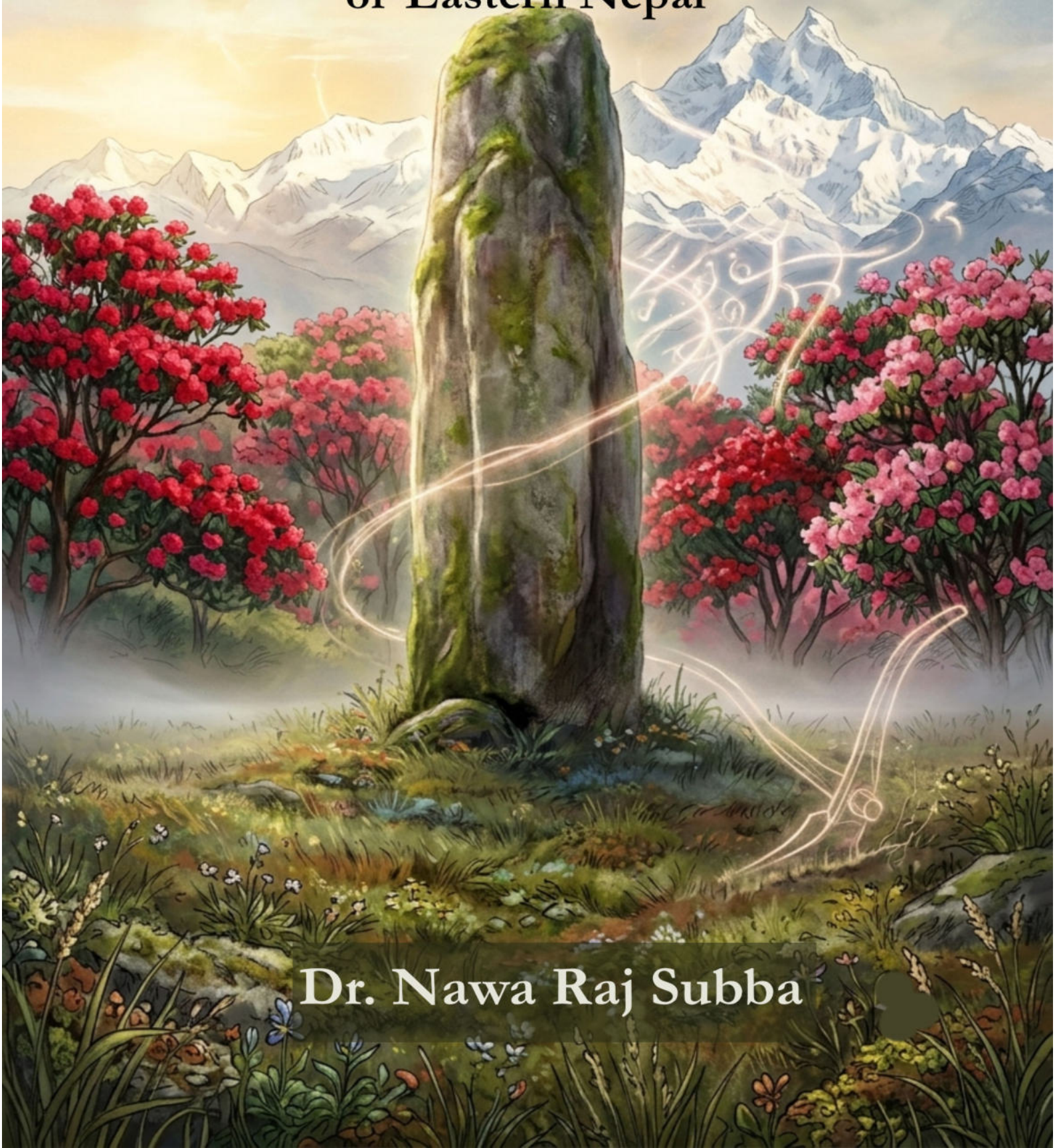


Stone, Soil & Mundhum

A Cultural and Anthropological Rediscovery
of Eastern Nepal



Dr. Nawa Raj Subba

Stone, Soil and Mundhum

Cultural and anthropological rediscovery of eastern Nepal

Dr. Nawa Raj Subba



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Preface

The abstract cry of a forgotten geography and the awakening of the homeland

The harsh truth is that history is often written by the victors, while culture is shaped and institutionalised by those who hold power. This reality runs deep in the history of South Asia. This is even more true in the case of Nepal. For a long time, the definition of our national identity and cultural history was sought only within the Malla or Shahi palaces and pagoda-style temples of the Kathmandu Valley. This 'Kathmandu-centric lens' always marginalised the primitive, nature-centric, and multifaceted cultural geography that stretches from Nepal's far eastern borders to the plains of Madhesh. The history of eastern Nepal was either ignored or its indigenous essence was erased by subsuming it into the mainstream, established religious empire.

In such an intellectual drought, Dr. Nawa Raj Subba's latest research-based work, "Stone, Soil and Earth: Cultural and Anthropological Rediscovery of Eastern Nepal", has come as a major and powerful earthquake in the Nepali academic world. This book is not just a tourist description of some old temples or caves. It is an anthropological excavation of the abstract cries and identities of the indigenous people buried under the glossy coating of established government rhetoric and 'Sanskritisation'. With great courage and academic integrity, the author has brought face to face that unbroken bond of the Terai, Chure and Himalayan foothills of Eastern Nepal, which had been disfigured by written history.

The most beautiful and revolutionary aspect of this work is its title and the philosophical triangle it carries—stone, soil, and mundhum. The author has completely demolished the Western or modern view that considers stone to be an inanimate rock. In Mundhum philosophy, stone is an intact witness to history, the physical presence of ancestors, and the altar of 'chotlung' that keeps a person's mental strength upright. This book very artistically explains how these natural rocks, standing tall from Mukkumlung in Taplejung to Halesung (Halesi) in Khotang, have preserved the self-respect of the indigenous people for generations.

Similarly, the book connects the metaphor of 'soil' with the labour and agricultural revolution of Madhesh. The fact that the Videha emperor of Janakpurdham, King Siradhwaj Janak, made the plough his flag and that Sita was born from the womb of the earth was not just mythological magic. It was the story of the labour of the indigenous Kirats, who were entering the agricultural era from the hunter-gatherer era. The author presents the 'Ghongri culture' of the Madheshi Dalit, Musahar and Tharu communities and the Kirat 'native words' that are still alive in their dialects today, with archaeological and linguistic evidence, irrefutably proving the ancient biological bridge between Madhesh and the hills.

Another important discussion raised by this book is the 'politics of

Sanskritisation'. Using sociological and anthropological tools, the author shows how local indigenous nature-worshipping sites were transformed into Hindu Shaktipeeths or Buddhist caves over time under the auspices of state power. How the Sammang rock in the Mundhum Yuma of the Sansari Maisthan in Rangeli, Morang, became Durga or Kali; how the primitive tribal cave of Halesi became the refuge of Bhasmasura and the centre of Padmasambhava's immortality practice; and how Mukkumlung fell into the clutches of capitalist cable car in the name of Pathibhara opens the reader's consciousness and eyes completely. This analysis is not a superficial lamentation of one religion displacing another, but rather a historical document of how the indigenous inhabitants preserved their ancestral identity even in the face of oppression and how this geography has become a living example of 'tri-religious coexistence' today.

Most importantly, the author uses modern genetic science. The book incorporates innovative research methods such as DNA markers and GPS technology, such as 'digital Chotlung mapping'. This has saved the book from being a mere collection of folk tales and given it the weight of a highly academic and scientific research paper. The similarity in environmental philosophy between the Judshital, or Siruva Pawan, celebrated in Baisakh, and the Umbhauri festival of the Kirats further deepens the multicultural reality of Nepali society.

Dr. Nawa Raj Subba is not just an archaeologist who studies the past; he is also a visionary anthropologist. How can the heritage of Chotlung, his village, provide a strong 'psychological foundation' for modern Kirat youth scattered around the world due to foreign employment or education? (Mental Anchor) His analysis of how it can be used to help people cope with depression and identity crises is very contemporary and practical. It shows that ancient indigenous philosophy is equally relevant in the treatment of mental illness in the 21st century.

The strongest aspect of this book is that it does not simply view the cultural geography of eastern Nepal as a dead relic of history. The author has not only attempted to awaken the indigenous consciousness buried within the cover of established religious discourses but has also examined the greatest crisis of the present era—environmental destruction and global migration (diaspora)—from an eco-anthropological perspective. From the historical trauma inflicted on indigenous culture by the legal end of the Kipat system to the mental turmoil of the Kirat youth searching for identity in the modern cities of Hong Kong or London and their attachment to their 'Chotlung', the way Dr. Subba has academically dissected the book and has made it an indispensable reference material for contemporary global anthropology.

In the end, "Stone, Soil and Earth" is the hidden mirror of Eastern Nepal, in which the whole of Nepal must see its face. The author's simple, understandable yet academically serious language style unknowingly leads the reader into the deep tunnel of history and brings them out into the light of truth. This book is an indispensable guidebook and milestone for university researchers, anthropologists, historians and every Nepali who is searching for the true roots of his soil. The sun always rises from the east, and we are fully confident that this academic light lit by Dr. Subba will continue to guide our understanding of history for ages.

Author's Note

Soil debt, the voice of ancestors, and my academic journey

I have often wondered: is our history really limited to what we read in school and college textbooks? What about the soil where we were born, the water we drank, the place where we grew up, and the mountains whose peaks we dreamed of? As I journeyed through the steep slopes of eastern Nepal, the cold Himalayan peaks and the hot plains of Madhesh, I noticed an interesting paradox in my long study and literary career. The books used to start our civilisation only with Kathmandu Valley's palaces or with the inheritance of the Khas kings of the west. However, when I heard the roar of the Koshi, the dark natural tunnel of Halesi, the Mukkumlung peak of Taplejung, and the typical speech of the rural Musahars of Janakpur, I felt that another, older and pure history was silently crying under the ground and in the blood of people. This book, "Stone, Soil and Earth: A Cultural and Anthropological Rediscovery of Eastern Nepal", is the result of a long and arduous academic journey undertaken by my soul in search of that hidden indigenous history.

The main reason for me to write this book is certainly not to get a new academic title or to display intellectual luxury. It is a small attempt to repay my debt to the soil and restore the voice of our primitive ancestors, whose history was deliberately covered with the glossy coating of the official language and Sanskritisation. When I closely observed the struggle between the indigenous Yakthung community and corporate capitalism over the construction of a cable car in Mukkumlung, Taplejung, I was shocked. For the market, that mountain was just an inanimate object to make profit and attract tourists. But, for the indigenous people, it was the highest peak of their self-respect and collective self-respect, 'Chotlung'. This fierce conflict of two eyes looking at the same geography gave me the greatest energy to write this book.

I have included three words in the title of the book—stone, soil, and mundhum. These three words are the three main pillars of my research. Stone is not just a roadblock or a building material for us; it is stability in the Mundhum philosophy and a living witness to our ancestors. Soil is not just mud for us; it is the great story of labour irrigated by the plough culture of King Sirdhwaj Janak, the earthly womb of Sita, and the Ghongri culture of the Musahars, the sons of the land of Madhes. And mundhum is that abstract philosophical bridge that connects both stone and soil and teaches people to live in the shelter of nature. I have tried to examine the interpenetration and coexistence between Hindu commentary and indigenous Mundhum consciousness established in this book from an impartial anthropological perspective without any dogma.

During my research, while exploring the ancient connection between Madhesh and the hills, I was surprised by the linguistic and genetic facts that I discovered. Janakpurdham today seems to be just a city of Hindu temples of Ram and Sita, but the roots of Maithili 'native words' spoken by the Dalit and artisan communities there – such as 'Tangi', 'Dabra', 'chang' and 'khoila' – are directly related to the hill Kirat languages.

This linguistic continuity and recent scientific research on DNA markers show that the upper castes, like the Jha or Thakur of Madhesh, although thousands of years old, are not indigenous nature-worshipping tribes, but rather they are a historical elite who have imposed Vedic overlays on local tribal civilisation. The real indigenous history is preserved by today's Musahars, Tharus, Mallahs and Danuwars through their nature worship and the Ghongi culture of daily life. Bringing out this reality is both the biggest challenge and success of my research.

While writing this book, I realised that the story of stone and soil is not limited to a specific geography. When our youth leave their homeland and wander in the diaspora, they physically go far away, but they carry the spiritual link of their native land with them. Therefore, in this book, I have not only covered the historical Sanskritisation of the past or the political anthropology that has been stripped of its charm, but I have also tried to cover the living reality of how the new generation, growing up in the storm of globalisation, is using technology to make its primitive 'Chotlung philosophy'. This is not only my academic research but also a sense of responsibility towards my own land and ancestors.

In preparing this book, I have tried to maintain the purity of language, its communicability, and its academic seriousness. I wanted the reader to feel not as if he were listening to a rigid lecture but rather as if the author himself were sitting in front of him, communicating with great intimacy, in the natural flow of sentences, within the mysterious tunnel of history.

The book was translated from Nepali to English. I have tried to pay great attention to detail when giving the information and also to offering clear references since this is an important subject from an academic point of view. Technical words are defined when necessary and APA 7th edition style is used for citation of the sources. Apart from conforming to the accepted academic conventions, I have tried to convey the ideas clearly and simply to Nepali readers. Additionally, it enables others to verify the sources and reference the work in subsequent studies.

I cannot find any words to express my gratitude to my esteemed friends, university colleagues, and especially to the Phedangma, Samba, and Budhapa tribal fathers of the villages of eastern Nepal and the Sada (Musahar) brothers of Madhesh, who have directly and indirectly supported me in the journey of writing and researching this book and who have opened their treasures of oral mundhum and folk tales before me without any self-interest.

In the end, this book is not the final truth of history; it is just a beginning. I fully believe that this book will force the state and the academic community to make Nepal's national history more inclusive, balanced and multidimensional. If this book can awaken even a little pride and curiosity in the minds of the reader towards their land, their ancestors and their native identity, then I will consider my years of labour and academic practice to be successful. The sun always rises from the east, and I hope that this book will definitely scatter a small spark of native awakening in the consciousness of the readers.

Dr. Nawa Raj Subba

Book Introduction

"Stone, Soil and Mundhum: A Cultural and Anthropological Rediscovery of Eastern Nepal" is a deeply researched and anthropological document of the geocultural map, indigenous history and Mundhum philosophy of Eastern Nepal. Challenging the national history of Nepal that has long been written through a Kathmandu-centric and mono-ethnic linguistic lens, this book reveals the hidden, multi-layered nature of Eastern Nepal, stretching from the Madhes to the Himalayas. And it has brought out the unbroken cultural heritage with scientific evidence.

The main discussion of the book is the established 'politics of Sanskritisation' and the indigenous 'tribal consciousness'. Author Dr. Nawa Raj Subba has provided this book with a strong academic weight by placing it in the context of linguistics, social anthropology, archaeological possibilities and recent genetic science (DNA analysis) rather than as a collection of dry history.

The book is mainly divided into five dimensions and their overall synthesis:

1. Barahakshetra and Bijayapur Section: Where the indigenous relationship between established Hindu incarnations and the primitive 'Koshi Mai' worship of the Majhi community is explored.

2. Rangeli's Worldly Maisthan: Where there is a discussion of the socio-religious transformation of how the sacred rock of the Mundhum Matri Shakti 'Yuma Sammam' was transformed into a Hindu Shaktipeeth over time.

3. Halesi Maratika Cave: A rare tri-religious coexistence and mixed heritage of Hindu, Buddhist and Kirtan philosophies (syncretic) Anthropological excavation of architecture.

4. Mukkulung (Pathibhara) Dispute: A story of contemporary resistance between corporate capitalism (the Kevalkar Project) and 'Chotlung', the peak of collective self-respect of the indigenous people in the high Himalayan region of Taplejung.

5. Janakpurdham and Chotlung Darshan: Revealing the Vedic overlay on the primitive 'Halo culture' of King Siradhwaj Janak, scientific evidence of the Ghonghi culture of Madhesi Dalits (Musahar and Tharu) and the Kirat 'native words' that are still alive in their dialects today.

6. Eco-anthropological dimension: A theoretical analysis of how Mundhum philosophy maintains a moral and animistic bond between humans and non-humans, rather than considering nature as merely a means of consumption.

7. Political-anthropological discussion: A historical exploration of the far-reaching impact of the abolition of the Kipat system on the intangible cultural heritage and sacred sites of indigenous peoples, from the expansion of the Gorkhali state to the Land Reforms Act 2021.

8. Diasporic Identity and Digital Renaissance: A contemporary reality of how Kirat youth in exile, thousands of miles away from their homeland, are using Mundhum and Chotlung philosophy as a psychological foundation to deal with identity crises and loneliness.

This book proves that the historical sites of eastern Nepal are not just physical sights; they are the ancestral foundations that protect our families and our mental health. (Mental Anchor) And they are the guardians of a shared future. Written in a humane style with academic seriousness

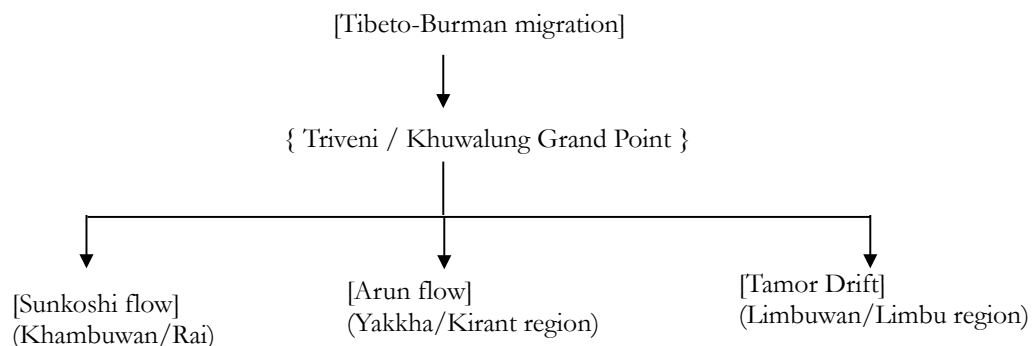
and interesting narrative flow, this work is an essential historical milestone for university researchers, historians, and every reader seeking the true identity of their land.

Chapter 1: Barahakshetra – Gateway to Kirat Civilization and the Dignity of Khuwalung

1. Introduction: Where the river and the Mundhum civilization emerged

This geography of Sunsari, where the Saptakoshi River cuts through the last rocky wall of the Mahabharata mountain range and enters the plain, is the primitive historical point of the indigenous Kirat civilisation. Which mainstream history today tries to identify only with the name 'Varaha Kshetra'? That land has actually been the working land and spiritual centre of the Kirat ancestors for many thousands of years before the Khas-Aryans, or people of the Vedic tradition, came to the Eastern Himalayas (Dahal, 1985). This is a strategic and geographical point from where the ancestors of the Kirats (Rai, Limbu, Yakkha, and Sunuwar) followed the Koshi and its branches and entered the Himalayas and hilly regions, namely Limbuwan and Khambuwan (Subba, 1999).

According to Kirat thought and oral scriptures, the Mundhum, a river is not just a flowing stream of water. It is the journey of our ancestors, their identity, and the continuation of their lives. The Triveni region, where rivers like Tamor, Arun, and Sunkoshi, which flow from the melting snows of the Himalayas, meet, has been the ancestral homeland of the Kirats since prehistoric times, yes, Ancestral Homeland (Sharma, 2004). Therefore, long before this region became the stage for any imported mythological narrative, it was a sacred land irrigated by the blood, sweat, and earthly consciousness of the Kirats, the sons of the land.

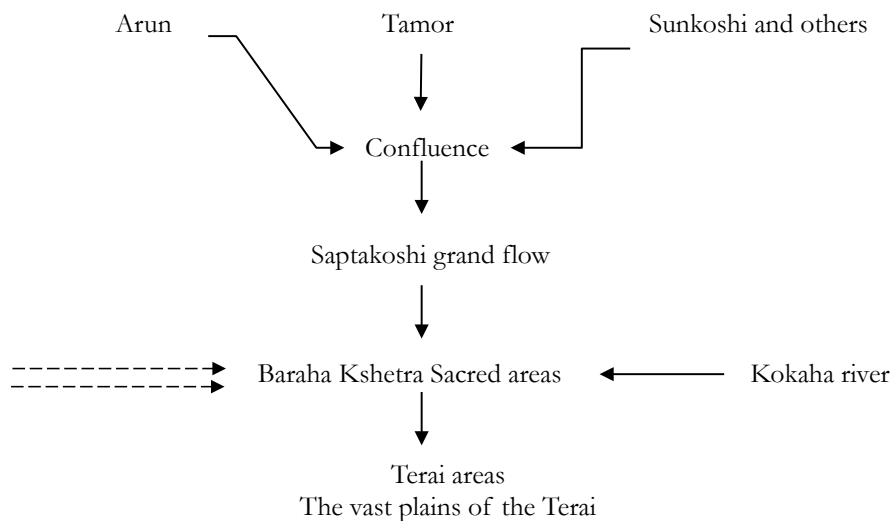


There is a point in the heart of Nepal's eastern geography where the harshness of the Himalayas melts into the vast generosity of the Terai. When the Saptakoshi River, cutting through the last rocky wall of the Mahabharata mountain range, enters the plains of the Terai, a unique point of natural and spiritual energy is created there. This point is Barahakshetra. Located a little above Chataradham, in the northern corner of the Sunsari district, this land is not just a geographical location; it is a living history of human civilisation, ancient legends and eternal epics.

Here is the sacred confluence of the Koka and Koshi rivers. This meeting point of the two streams is not just a combination of water, but rather it is a meeting point of nature and man, history and narrative, and earth and sky.

From a geographical point of view, Barahakshetra is a centre of immense natural power. Seven rivers (Tamor, Arun, Sunkoshi, Dudhkoshi, Tamakoshi, Likhu and Indrawati) originating from the high glaciers of Tibet and the Himalayas merge into Triveni and move forward as one gigantic body. This body of water, which roars out of the narrow gorge of

the mountains, slows down its pace a bit after reaching Barahakshetra and begins to spread across the flat land of the Terai. This transitional geography is a miracle in itself. This is where the mountains end and the plains begin. If for physics this is a point of change in the flow of the river, for spiritual consciousness it is a great energy centre on this earth, a geomantic centre.



According to the ancient Hindu mythology, this land is the divine stage where the oldest act of salvation in the universe was accomplished. In the golden age, when a demon named Hiranyaksha stole the earth and created the primordial ocean, when the earth was hidden in the immense depths, the balance of creation was disturbed. The sinking of the earth meant the end of the possibility of life. To save the universe from this great crisis, Lord Vishnu took the form of the mighty 'Varaha' (wild boar) as his third incarnation. It is said that Lord Varaha stood on the banks of the Koshi and Koka rivers and lifted the earth with his arms and pulled it out of the swamp of the sea. However, in the ancient period of history, there were no magnificent temples or metal statues like today. In the primitive era, this area was limited to only a distinctive sign of water, huge and black rocks on the banks of the river, and the roar of nature.

In the Eastern tradition of thought, a river is not just a flow of water. A river is a living medium for communication between man and God. That is why Barahakshetra is called a "teertha" in the scriptures. The literal meaning of the word 'teertha', made from the Sanskrit word 'tri', is 'a point of crossing' or 'ghat'. This is a ghat, where a person can transcend the suffering of

the material world and touch the peak of spiritual consciousness. This place, where the water of the Koshi, carrying the purity of the mountains, and the water of the Koka, flowing from the native hilly valleys, meet, is believed to purify the inner consciousness of a person. Since ancient times, this place has been a place of penance for sages and seekers, where the silence of nature and the music of the river lead people on the path of self-realisation.

2. Primitive Thatathalo and the Entry of Kirat: Historical Foundation

A sociological study of the history of eastern Nepal reveals that Hinduisation Before the process of colonisation began, a purely Kirat way of life existed in this region (Bista, 1991). According to linguistic and anthropological evidence, the Tibeto-Burman ancestors of the language family descended south through the mountain passes in the north and east; this gorge of Saptakoshi became the main gateway for them to ascend and spread out into the mountains.

Before entering the narrow gorges and valleys of the mountains, the Kirat ancestors established their first settlements on the banks of the Koshi. The climate, native vegetation, and water resources here protected their existence. Later, as the population grew and in search of new land, they moved forward, taking the tributaries of the Koshi.

The followers of Sunkoshi spread to the Khambuwan (Middle Kirat/Rai) region.

Those living along the banks of the Tamor River settled in the Thums of the Limbuwan (Kirat/Limbu) region.

The people who captured the Arun River were established as the Yakkha and Lohorung communities (Subba, 1999).

In this way, the land where today's temple complex stands is the entire lineage of the Kirat tribe. And geography is the primaeval witness to division. History written without this essence remains incomplete.

3. The River is Mother: Indigenous Base

The history of Barahakshetra is incomplete if we look only at the mediaeval or modern temple structures. Before digging into the historical foundation of this region, we must understand the consciousness of the primitive inhabitants of this place. Many centuries before the Varah story of Hinduism was established here, this land was the most sacred religious and cultural centre of the original indigenous people of eastern Nepal – the Varahi, Danuwar, Majhi and Kirat groups. These sons of the land have spent thousands of years on this bank of the Koshi River. For them, this geography was not a page of any written scripture, but rather a direct experience of their lives.

In the tribal view, the confluence of two rivers, or 'Dobhan', is the abode of a powerful spiritual force. They saw the union of the Koka and the Koshi as the union of two opposite but complementary forces that govern the universe. It was just like the concept of 'Yin and Yang' in Chinese philosophy or 'Shiva and Shakti' in Tantric philosophy. Especially for the Majhi community, whose entire life, livelihood and existence was connected to the river, the Koshi was not just a water source. The Koshi was literally 'Koshi Mai' – simultaneously the mother who gives life and the goddess who can destroy everything when angered.

The primitive river-philosophy of fishermen and Kirats

- River: 'Koshi Mai' (Living Consciousness and Primordial Mother)
- Sangam (Confluence): The great union of two natural forces
- Medium of worship: Direct communication with nature and the native language
- Symbol: The huge, black rocks of the riverbank

Long before the grand shikhara-style temples of today were built, the local priests (known locally as Naxo, Gongpa or Bhuyar) used to worship by the water. Their worship did not involve complex Sanskrit mantras, tantric rules of incense and lamps, or Brahmanical rituals. Instead, they communicated with the river in their own mother tongue, in their own simple and intimate way. They offered ripe grains, wild flowers and fresh fish to the river to prevent accidents while boating, to prevent the nets from emptying while fishing, and to prevent the Koshi from changing its course and washing away the villages during the rainy season. For them, the temples were the black, weathered stones on the riverbank. In these stones, they saw the faces of their ancestors and nature. This religion is a purely ecocentric religion born of a fear and reverence for nature. There was faith.

4. Khuwalung: Kirat Faith, Identity, and Ancestral Mark

Khuwalung, a natural rock located at the Triveni confluence of the Saptakoshi (seven), is the oldest and most vibrant monument of the Kirat civilisation. In the Kirat Rai and Limbu languages, 'khuwa' means 'water' and 'lung' means 'stone' or 'rock', i.e., 'the sacred stone in the water' (Majhi, 2015). This rock is not just a geological rock; it is the shared cultural heart of the entire Kirat people, a living text of their ancient history and a symbol of their ancestors.

Khuwalung: Cultural essence

- Literal meaning: Khuwa (water) + Lung (stone) = Sacred rock in water
- Mundhumi Symbolism: The Primitive Oath of Kirat Ancestors and the Point of Clan Division
- Spiritual role: Worshipped as the origin in Sakela, Udhauli-Ubhauli and Pitru Karya
- Identity Crisis: The Double Wreck of Modern Development (Water Transport) and Hinduisation

According to the Mundhum legend, the three ancestors of the Kirat (known in different Mundhum as Taya, Khiya and Vaya or similar names) arrived at this symbolic point of the Khuwalung stone while moving forward in search of civilisation. At that time, this stone blocked the flow of the river and blocked the way. The ancestors were able to cross this path only by worshipping their primal powers and swearing by the blood of sacred birds or native natural elements, as is sung in the Mundhum (Majhi, 2015).

They took an oath while sitting next to this particular stone, calling upon the Koshi River and this ancient rock as witnesses, promising to never forget their forebears and genealogy, wherever their descendants may go in the future. That is why, even today, the Kirat Rai people must invoke the name of Khuwalung when performing the Sakela dance, and the Limbu people

must do the same during the Tongsing ritual. No ancestral rite or Mundhum ritual is considered complete without invoking Khuwalung, for according to Kirat belief, the souls of the ancestors journey toward the Himalayas along this very path (Subba, 1999).

5. Tungdunge Mundhum: The story of Barahakshetra and the Samba dynasty

Another strong link that makes the Kirat history of this land even more scholarly and distinctive is the ancestry of the Limbu Samba; Tungdunge is associated with the gotra Mundhum. While mainstream Hindu history interprets the prince of Barahakshetra as an incarnation of Vishnu, Mundhum presents it as an anthropological and intercultural fusion (Introduction, 1985).

According to the Mundhum, the ancient god of the ancestors, Tungdunge, was originally a young prince from the Koshi region (Varaha Kshetra). In the historical process of searching for his lost brothers, he went to the mountains and reached the Mewakhola region of Limbuwan. There, the ancestors of the ancestors welcomed him as a guest and treated him with high respect and hospitality (Subba, 2023).

Mundhum evidence:

Pleased with the hospitality and intimacy of his ancestors, Prince Tungdunge blessed them with protection and prosperity for their descendants, in memory of which, even today, the 'Tungdunge Kulpuja' is performed every three years by sacrificing a goat (Subba, 1999).

This narrative makes it clear that the historical significance of Barahakshetra is not limited to Hindu texts; its excavations are part of the Mundhum history of the Limbu people and the spiritual geography of the Kirat people. Spiritual geography can only be complete by connecting with it.

This is the most beautiful and strongest link in the tribal base—the Mundhum, the original source of the Limbu community's oral history and spiritual philosophy. Mundhum is not just a story; it is the origin, code of conduct, history, and cosmology of the Limbu people. It is an oral tradition. A deep study of this mundhum reveals the fact that the historical-cultural relationship between Barahakshetra and the Samba Limbu caste is very close and ancient.

According to the Mundhum legend, Tungdunge, a highly revered and powerful god of the Samba caste, was originally the youngest prince of Barahakshetra. This legend in itself is a great anthropological sign, which proves the ancient historical connection between the Kirats of the hills and this sacred centre of the Terai. According to the story, the youngest prince went to the hills in search of his lost brothers or sisters. While exploring the mountain gorges and forests, he reached the historical Mewakhola region of Limbuwan. There he met the ancestors of the Samba clan (Subba, 2023).

During that historic meeting, the elders of Mewakhola did not view the new guests as foreigners or enemies. They treated them with the utmost hospitality and service, including tubers, wild grains, and meat, in accordance with their indigenous traditions (Tangnam). Prince Tungdung was very emotional and pleased with this pure love and high respect from his ancestors. He was happy and blessed his ancestors with prosperity, saying that there would never

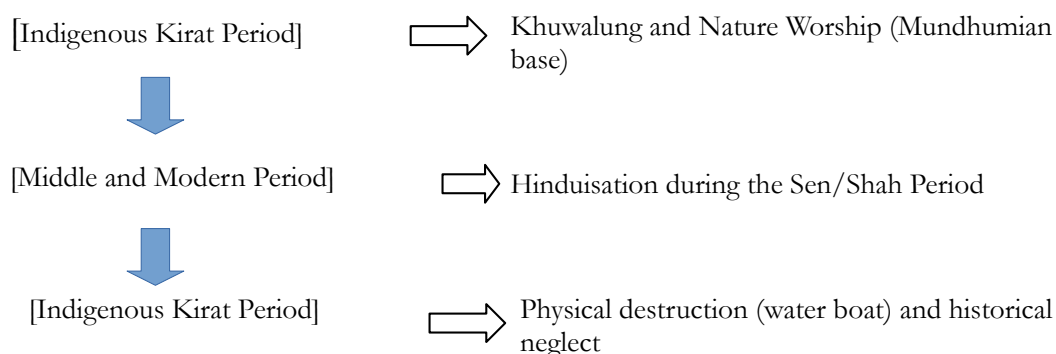
be a shortage of food, that the lineage would not be destroyed, and that the forest and nature would protect them (Subba, 2023).

As a continuation of the same historical-religious tradition, even today, the Limbu community, including the Samba, pray for the progressive progress, progress and health of their descendants and perform the 'Tungdunge Kulpuja' ritual every three years. This worship is an integral part of the identity of the Limbu caste. Traditionally, a goat is sacrificed in this ritual. This sacrificial ritual is not just a blood offering but rather a symbolic means of paying off the debt owed to the ancestors and the agreement made by their ancestors with nature in the wild age. After the sacrifice, the ancestors and the nature god are worshipped, where the journey of the ancestors is narrated while reciting the Mundhum Samlo (Mundhum song) (Subba, 2023).

This account reveals the ancient historical interpenetration between the Khas-Aryas (who consider Barahakshetra to be the abode of Vishnu) and the Kirat culture (who consider it to be the origin of Tungdunge) in eastern Nepal and the geo-cultural context of Barahakshetra. It irrefutably highlights the importance of the same geography. It shows how the same geography can be equally sacred and venerated in different cultures!

6. The process of Hinduisation and the double whammy of identity

Historically, how the Kirat nature of Barahakshetra and Triveni Sangam was gradually eclipsed is linked to the political history of Nepal during the mediaeval and Shah-Rana periods (Sharma, 2004). With the eastward expansion of the Sen kings and later the Gorkhali rulers, Hinduisation under royal patronage took place in this native Kirat land. It is state-sponsored Hinduisation. The process has been accelerated. This process has continued even after the advent of democracy or republics. On the one hand, while the political inclusion of indigenous peoples is taking place, on the other hand, the pace of internal cultural domination and Sanskritisation has become even faster.



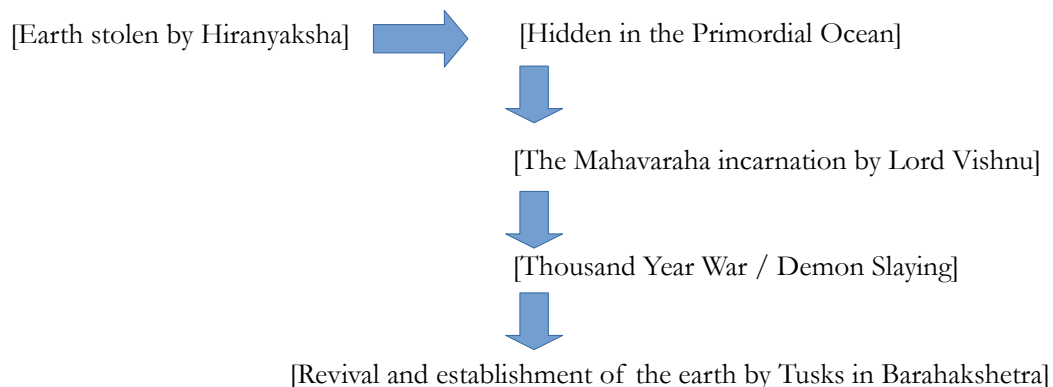
Gradually, the stories of the Varaha Purana were promoted to suppress the historicity of the Kirat ancestral sacred stone 'Khuwalung'. The primitive black stones on the riverbanks, in which fishermen and Kirats saw the forms of their ancestors, were reinterpreted as the feet or symbols of Vishnu's incarnations (Bista, 1991).

This process has left the Kirats as a minority and religiously marginalised in their own sacred sites. In modern times, even attempts were made to break the Khuwalung rock with a crane under the pretext of operating jet boats and water transport on Saptakoshi (Majhi, 2015). This tendency to throw stones at the heart of primitive civilisation in the name of development and mainstream religion has dealt a double blow to the indigenous Kirat identity.

Resurrection of the Earth: Hindu Story

When the Puranas were composed and expanded in India in the mediaeval period and with the development of the Samvat, a broader Sanatan Hindu form was added to the indigenous identity of Barahakshetra. The greatest evidence of this is the Barahakshetra. This Purana is one of the most important texts among the 18 Mahapuranas of the Vedic tradition, which describes in detail the glory of Barahakshetra, its location and its spiritual importance.

The story described in the Puranas is not just a description of a mythical battle; it is a great metaphor for 'the salvation of a land in distress'. Yes. According to the story, in the golden age, the mighty demon Hiranyaksha, son of Diti and Kashyapa, created terror in the universe. He stole the consciousness of the earth and threw it into the primordial ocean in the womb of the universe. (Garbhodaka Adhya Ocean), hidden at the bottom of the earth. The loss of the earth means the loss of the ecosystem, religion and life. After the prayers of the gods and sages, Lord Vishnu assumed a wonderful form—Mahavaraha. His body was as vast as a mountain, his hair was as sharp as Kush, and his eyes were as bright as the sun.



Lord Varaha, a divine incarnation as a wild boar, went deep down into the ocean and gave a challenge to Hiranyaksha. According to scriptures, they had a fierce and severe war for a thousand long years. Finally, Lord Varaha destroyed that evil force and used his powerful tusk. In the year 1000, he brought the earth above the surface of the water, keeping it safe. That primordial point where the earth was lifted out of the water and made stable was this Varahashtra. Thus, the Varaha avatar gave the world a new life, a new stability and revival. It gave the feeling. Therefore, this place was pronounced with special reverence in the Puranas as 'Varaha's field' or 'Kokamukh field'.

Architectural identities

The physical form of Barahakshetra and the architecture of its temples are a subject of

study in themselves. The chief temple here is in Shikhar style, which was made in 1911 AD. It is said that generally pagoda-style temples are made in hilly areas of Nepal, whereas this temple is constructed on the junction of the Terai and hills. It is unique and special to have a Shikhar-style temple that reflects the influence of the Gupta and mediaeval architecture of the Indian subcontinent. Although the present temple has been renovated at various times during the Sen kings and later during the Rana period. And the dignity of its ancient form still remains.

The inner sanctum of the temple houses a huge and ancient stone statue of Varaha Avatar. This statue is also very unique from the point of view of art, where Vishnu has a human body with a boar's head and is seen protecting Lakshmi (Earth) on his lap or shoulder. Just in front of the temple is the Koka-Koshi Ghat; there is a wide stone staircase leading to the water's edge.

For centuries, pilgrims have believed that a dip in the cool waters of the Koka and Koshi rivers washes away the sins and mental anguish of a person from his seven births. There are sacred ponds like Surya Kund and Vishnu Kund within the temple premises. Devotees offer tarpan and offer arghya to the Sun God. Every brick, stone and pillar of the temple has absorbed thousands of years of prayers, chanting, tears and faith from people.

7. Bridge between cultures: Kirat and Varah

From the perspective of anthropology and sociology, the most beautiful aspect of Varahashtra is the amazing parallelism and harmony between the Hindu Varah story and the Kirat Mundhum religion that can be seen here. This is not a place where one culture has oppressed the other, but rather a common place where both cultures have embraced each other. Kirat culture is basically a nature-worshipping culture. Their relationship with the forest, wildlife, and land is spiritual. In Kirat Mundhum, the wild boar (Sawa Chilibung) is seen as an extremely powerful, courageous, and earth-protecting creature. The boar is that creature of the forest that digs the ground with its snout and pulls out the roots and lives directly connected to the inner layer of the earth. On the other hand, in Hinduism, Varaha (boar) is also considered the saviour of the earth. This is not just a coincidence; it is a manifestation of the same divine qualities that human consciousness sees in a creature of nature.

For this reason, every year on Kartik Purnima or other special festivals, thousands of Kirat Rais and Limbus from remote hill districts like Dhankuta, Bhojpur, Sankhuwasabha, Panchthar and Taplejung descend on Varahashtra to remember their ancestors and forefathers. When they enter the temple and worship Varah, they are not worshipping just one Vedic Vishnu. In their minds, the image of their primaeval ancestors, the protector god of the forest, and the prince Tungdunge is described in the Mundhum dances. A strange scene is seen in the local shops here – Kirat youths buy idols or pictures of Hindu gods with great interest, but after taking them home, they establish the idols as ancestral deities according to their own Kirat customs and legends. This is an end to religious fanaticism and cultural harmony. It is an excellent example of this. This is why Eastern Nepal has a distinct "Eastern identity". It has been built where the lines of Aryan and Kirat have been erased and the colours of a single common Nepali culture have become deeper.

Syncretism	
Vedic / Hindu perspective	Kirat / Mundhumi perspective
• The third incarnation of Vishnu (Varaha)	• The primordial protector of the earth
• Saving the Earth with Darha	• The power to dig the soil with the snout
• Kokamukh Tirtha (Salvation Area)	• The origin of God Tungdunge

8. Kumbh Mela: Twelve Years of Miracles

Barahakshetra is a glorious land that holds a special place on the spiritual map of not only Nepal but also the entire world.

The biggest proof of this is the Mahakumbh Mela held here. As per Hindu scriptures, there are some sacred locations in the world on the basis of which the Kumbh Mela takes place. Barahakshetra is one such rare location where the complete Kumbh Mela is organised once in every twelve years and the Ardhakumbha Mela is organised after every six years. In the mythological narration of the Samudra Manthan, the gods and demons were fighting for the Amrit Ghat (kalash), and some drops of this Amrit fell at four places on earth, namely Prayag, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nashik. However, according to Eastern traditional spiritual beliefs and the inner workings of the 'Varaha Purana', Barahakshetra is considered to be the fifth secret place where the nectar was obtained or where Lord Varaha himself established the peace of nectar after saving the earth.

Major venues of the Kumbh Mela

Major venues of the Kumbh Mela	Specification
1. Haridwar (India)	Entry point to the Ganges River plain
2. Prayagraj (India)	The trinity of Ganga, Yamuna and Gupta Saraswati
3. Ujjain (India)	The banks of the Kshipra River, the land of Mahakal
4. Nashik (India)	Godavari River Bank
5. Barahakshetra (Nepal)	The Himalayan confluence of Saptakoshi and Koka (Fifth Secret Kumbh)

The peaceful and secluded banks of the Koshi suddenly transform into a small spiritual world. Naga sadhus from various akharas of India, yogis descended from the Himalayan peaks, great scholars of the Vedas, and millions of ordinary families set up small tents on the sands of the Koshi River. They hang themselves. Traditionally, this fair is not just a place to bathe and earn dharma; it is a great parliament for exchanging ideas. Here, sadhus play the Dhuni; there are bhajans and kirtan all night long, and Mundhum activists tell their folk tales. The continuity of this faith, which has been going on for centuries, proves that political boundaries can never stop

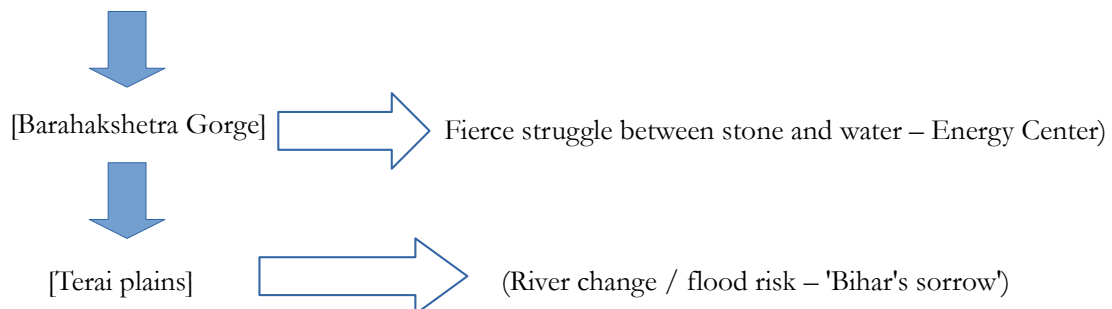
the inner spiritual connection of people. The simultaneous immersion of millions of people in the cold waters of the Koshi at the same time in the early morning presents a great form of human unity and faith.

9. Geographical Monument: The Sorrows of Bihar

To understand the true essence of Barahakshetra and its spiritual splendour, it is necessary to deeply understand its physical form, the role of the Koshi River. The Koshi is not a gentle stream of water; it's a living, dynamic and sometimes very powerful physical force. The river can be dangerous because it is fast and unpredictable and is prone to building up sand. It comes down from the mountains and travels hundreds of kilometres over the plains of the Terai. It continues to modify, change, and change. Because of this destructive form, it has been called the 'Sorrow of Bihar' throughout history. Or it has been called the 'challenge of eastern Nepal'.

But what is interesting is that the river, which becomes synonymous with destruction after reaching the plain, is the same river that flows in the last gorge of the mountain, where Barahakshetra is located. The fact that this temple is located exactly at the place where the river is the narrowest, deepest and surrounded by rocks is a great natural monument in itself. Due to this geographical structure, any person who comes here feels the influence of a kind of primal-divine power. (Numinous Experience) Feels.

[The rapid flow of the rivers from Himalayas]



Standing here, on one side, you can see the majestic black rocks of the Koshi, carved by the rapid flow of the river for millions of years, and on the other side, the vast depths of blue-green water. This view makes one realise the vastness of nature and how short and insignificant our human lives are in front of it. This terrible and beautiful part of nature. Because of its form, every religious ritual or prayer performed here is imbued with a kind of deep devotion and inner fear. People understand that life here is possible only by taking refuge in the river, not by conquering it.

10. The need for conservation, revitalization, and indigenous tourism

In today's present-day situation, Barahakshetra and Khuwalung cannot just conserve the temple or a stone. It has to be revived as the multicultural primitive history of Nepal (Bhandari, 2014). Government and local authorities have to move from existing promotions only of Hindu

holy places.

Mundhum Circuit: A "Kirat Mundhum Cultural Circuit" has to be created by connecting Barahakshetra, Chataradham and Khuwalung, as this would serve for the promotion of indigenous tourism. (Indigenous Tourism) Let's promote (Gaudel, 2020).

Heritage Conservation of Khuwalung: Khuwalung was declared a 'National Intangible Cultural Heritage Site. Its historical significance should be declared and included in school and university curricula.

Rights of Fishermen and Kirat: Local fishermen and Kirat youth should be given first rights and ownership in modern river-based tourism businesses so that their economic and cultural lives can be preserved simultaneously (Majhi, 2015).

Before the dawn of the modern era, reaching Barahakshetra was a great and difficult asceticism in itself. The terrain above Chatara was surrounded by dense forests, fear of wild animals, and difficult paths along rocky river banks. It used to take people several days to reach here by walking from Dharan or Inaruwa. However, in today's 21st century, this situation has changed rapidly. The development of physical infrastructure has greatly reduced the distance to Barahakshetra.

The biggest credit for this transformation goes to the construction of the Chatara Bridge and the expansion of the Chatara-Barahakshetra road section. The Chatara Bridge, built over the Saptakoshi River, is not just a concrete structure; it has directly connected the far eastern and central hilly regions of Nepal with the Terai and the west. Not only is it a great engineering feat, it has also connected the religious geography of Barahakshetra with a modern market.

What used to be a difficult three-day journey to reach can now be reached easily in just two hours by car from Biratnagar Airport or Dharan Bazaar. Due to this ease of travel, Barahakshetra is no longer just a place of penance for powerful monks but rather a 'one-day tourist destination' for domestic and foreign tourists who come to visit on weekends. (Day-tourism Destination) It is done.

A large network of local businesses has spread around the temple. Local tribals and traders are earning a good income by selling genuine Rudraksha beads, wild Bhirmah, indigenous herbs and Koshi fish brought from the mountains. However, along with this economic prosperity and easy access, a major modern challenge has been added to the primitive silence and peace of Barahakshetra, a solution to which needs to be found in time.

Environmental and cultural protection

This rapid modernisation and increasing popularity of Barahakshetra has also brought with it some serious environmental and cultural crises. If we do not pay attention to the conservation of this divine confluence in time, future generations will see only concrete temples; its spiritual energy and natural beauty will be lost forever.

The first and most immediate challenge is river pollution. The sacred waters of Koka and Koshi are becoming polluted as thousands of pilgrims and tourists who come here daily throw away plastic bottles, puffing shells, and religious items. Activities such as the dumping of non-biodegradable items into the river in the name of religious observances are wreaking havoc on aquatic organisms and the river's ecosystem.

[Rapid modernization]



(Environmental Challenge)

- Plastic and waste pollution
- Fear of dams and hydroelectric projects
- Risk of old ghats being submerged

(Cultural Challenge)

- The advent of motorboats and technology
- Displacement of fishermen and indigenous culture
- Danger of 'Majhi Mundhum' disappearing

The second threat is even bigger and more policy-level—proposals for dams and hydroelectric projects. Large dams above Chatara to generate electricity from the vast waters of the Koshi River or to control floods(High Dams)Plans to build the dam are often debated. If a large dam is built in the upper reaches of the Barahakshetra, it will completely disrupt the balance of the primitive and natural ecology of the area. Due to the artificial change in water levels, there is a serious risk of inundation or collapse of the thousands of years old historical ghats, Suryakundas, and even the foundations of temples here.

The third and most tragic aspect is the cultural displacement of the indigenous guardians of the river – the Majhi community. With the introduction of modern motorboats on the Koshi, the fishermen, who traditionally earn their living by sailing wooden boats and protecting the river, have been pushed to the banks. They have not only been displaced economically, but along with them, the oral history of the Koshi's ebb and flow, their indigenous knowledge, and the “Majhi Mundhum” (folklore of the river) that pacifies the river are also on the verge of extinction. Therefore, alongside the preservation of physical temples, safeguarding this intangible cultural heritage is the greatest need of the hour.

11. Conclusion: The path to a shared and inclusive history

This historical confluence of Barahakshetra and Khuwalung proves that the foundation of the history of eastern Nepal is firmly rooted in the Kirat Mundhum civilisation. Long before the arrival of the Khas-Aryans and the establishment of Hindu temples, this land was the primitive home and centre of spiritual energy of the Kirat Rai, Limbu, and Majhi people.

Barahakshetra is a strong, unwavering and glorious pillar of the spiritual and physical geography of not only eastern Nepal but also the entire country. It is such a unique and sacred place, where the high mountains of the Mahabharata bow down forever to the vast plains of the Terai. This is not just a geography of stone and soil, but rather it is a rare great confluence point in the world where the primitive nature worship of the indigenous Kirats and fishermen, the culture of the river and the eternal philosophies of Hindu mythology meet.

Even amidst the gloom and the roar of the river Koshi, you get a glimpse of the story of the mythical Varaha avatar, who rescued life from being washed off by lifting the earth out of the river. The Koshi basin continues to be a living symbol of tolerance, harmony and resurgence

today. The verses of the Mundhum and the mantras of the Vedas flow in unison in the air here. Just as in ancient times, Mahavaraha lifted the earth in distress and saved it, in today's modern and troubled times, Varaha Kshetra continues its flow by becoming an unsurpassed symbol of faith, cultural harmony and stability for the people of this region. It is eternal like the flow of the river and immortal like the faith of a person.

Even though Hinduisation at some point in history has changed its external appearance, its inner soul is still Mundhum. Even today, the roar of the Koshi echoes not only the story of the Varaha Avatar but also the Mundhum tune of the oath taken by the ancestors at Khuwalung and the journey of Prince Tungdunge. Therefore, to protect the dignity of Varaha Kshetra, it is an absolute necessity today to reinterpret and preserve it from an inclusive and indigenous perspective, respecting its Kirat history.

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Chapter 2: The Aathpahare Rais of Dhankuta and Barahakshetra: Cultural Land Ownership, Hinduisation, and Historical Change

1. Background and Introduction

Barahakshetra, a popular Hindu pilgrimage site, lies on the banks of the Saptakoshi River in eastern Nepal. Historically and anthropologically, however, this region is not merely the hub of the ancient Hindu faith but is the original cultural and spiritual heritage of the Mundhum civilisation and the aboriginal Aathpahare Rais of Dhankuta, the Kirats. The intimate association that the indigenous peoples have with their own natural land goes beyond economic and pragmatic values but encompasses their 'soulful' and 'earthy' connections, which anthropological scholars refer to as the cosmovision of the indigenous worldview.

The Aathpahare Rais are indigenous peoples from the lower part of Dhankuta District and the vicinity of the Tamor River. The life of this particular Kirat group—including their history and their 'Mundhum' (oral classic tradition)—is intricately connected with Barahakshetra and the surrounding Koshi region. This article will provide a scholarly anthropological analysis as to when this historical association of Aathpahare Rais with Barahakshetra came into being, the evidence from Mundhum and history, and how this area was later Sanskritised or Hinduised by formulating Barahakshetra and state policy.

2. The Historical Relationship between the Aathpahare Rais and Barahakshetra

The antiquity of the relationship between Aathpahare Rais and Barahakshetra predates historical sources, i.e., is prehistoric. According to anthropology, there are several indicators for this relationship found in the oral history of the tribal groups' 'Mundhum'. The history of origin, migration, and culture of Aathpahare Rais is centred on the confluence of the Saptakoshi and the Tamor rivers. "The ancestors lived in the vicinities of Koshi, hunted wild animals, sought roots and tubers, and offered sacrifices of pigs to the god/goddess of nature (Sama/Chuma) in their traditional practices. Barahakshetra is the ancestral land of our foremost ancestor named "Chuma", goddess of nature. (Aathpahare Rai Mundhum oral narration)

Although there is no concrete archaeologically determined date for this relationship to last, anthropological calculations show that it extends to about 1000 B.C. Since the Kai Period (pre-Kirat kingdom period). Like other Kirat tribes (Limbu, Yakkha, and Sunuwar), Aathpahare Rais also considered this place their childhood playground (Maang) and the land route of their post-mortem destination. Historically, Aathpahare had already claimed their ancestral property on this land since prior to the reign of the Sen Dynasty (14th-18th centuries).

3. Evidence of Aathpahare Rai Cultural Dominance

The following anthropological and historical evidence might establish the historical and cultural dominance of the Aathpahare Rais over the Barah region and the banks of the Koshi River: Mundhum evidence (oral history): There are clear records in the Mundhum of the Aathpahare Rais recited during the occasions of death, birth, and festivals (e.g., Tauwa and Badangmi), referring to the names of Chatara, Barahkshetra, and Kaushika (Koshi) rivers frequently. It is stated in the Mundhum that their ancestors performed the ritual of nature worship on this site.

Tradition of sacrifices of goats and pigs: Despite the pigs being ritually unclean in Hinduism, Kirats have been offering sacrifices of their young pigs and boars to appease their ancestors and nature outside the precincts of the Barahkshetra temple or in historically significant places from ancient times to when this practice was banned by the state.

The term "Baraha" (etymology and native explanation): In the view of anthropologists, the etymology of the word 'Vara' or 'Bara' in the Kirat language refers to water, stone, or a nature deity. It was subsequently Sanskritised into 'Varaha' (a boar). The boar in the Limbus language is called 'Saraha'. Subba, in his work 'Tungdung mundhum', argues the same: that 'Barahachetra' has originated from Saraha (Subba, 2023).

Chatara Fair and the eight watches: During the days of the full moon of Karttike and Sankranti of Magh, Aathpahare Rais, from Dhankuta, made a pilgrimage to Barahakshetra to offer water and sugar jaggery to their ancestors' spirits in their traditional "chindo".

4. When Baraha Purana was written, what were its historicity and justification?

In order to solidify Barah Kshetra as the principal Hindu place of pilgrimage, thereby sanitising the place and area. The period of the composition of Baraha Purana, which falls into the category of 18 Mahapuranas, is subject to disagreement among scholars and orientalist.

Researcher /Scholar	Estimated writing time	Main arguments
R.C. Hazra	8th to 10th centuries AD	Based on the language of the Puranas and the descriptions of the pilgrimages included in them.
Winternitz	After the 10th century AD	The period of propagation and expansion of the Vaishnava sect.

According to most historians, the original Barahapurana was written in the Gupta period (4th–5th century). But current and section dealing with the 'Barahakshetra Mahatmya' of the Koshi region of Nepal have been compiled in the 9th–12th cent. AD. The Purana mythologised the story of the indigenous nature god/Kirat pig/boar (which Kirat considered sacred as their symbol of power) into a 'Varaha avatar' of Vishnu. The indigenous story was

turned into Hindu mythologisation.

5. Analysis of Sanskritisation and Hinduisation of Indigenous Heritage:

According to M.N. Srinivas (anthropologist), Sanskritisation is a process by which tribal and lower-caste communities change their cultural practices, rituals, and deities into so-called higher-caste (Brahmanical) culture or by imposing higher-caste values upon their heritage as it came through imposition due to the presence of power (state). This is exactly what happens with the Barahakshetra, where political-religious dominance characterized what we may call a political hegemony of the state-sponsored (or supported) Hindu religion:

[Kirat Mundhumian Nature Worship/Ancestral Place]



((Protection of the state during the Senna and Shah periods)
[Composition of the Barah Purana and the imposition of the myth (Varaha Avatar)]



(Ban on sacrificial practices / Appointment of Brahmins as priests)
[Complete Hinduisation and Displacement of Kirats]

A) Revising and Spreading of Myths:

The tribal Aathpahara worshipped nature, and the power of wild boars/animals was identified by the Hindu sacred text as the third incarnation of Vishnu, 'the boar which killed Hiranyaksha. 'Suddenly the indigenous deity were assimilated into the vast Hindu pantheon, making them religiously marginal in their homeland.

B) Legal Displacement and State Policy:

The unification of Nepal (1774 CE) under Prithvi Narayan Shah and the enactment of the Muluki Ain (1854) by the Rana government officially enforced the Hindu values. The Aathpahare Rais, a tribe living in Dhankuta, had their ancestral Kipat lands confiscated. Ownership and management of the Barahakshetra temple was handed to priests of Brahmin lineages (such as the Mahants of Pindeshwar and Barahakshetra). Killing of pigs on the temple premises was banned, directly challenging the Aathpahara's Mundhum style of worship.

C) Displacement of Language and Culture:

The vernacular local languages were Sanskritised or adapted with Hindu names; the names in the vicinity of the Koshi River were changed. The Aathpahare Rais, who never visited temples to pay respect to idols, were obliged to pay obeisance from a distance. In the course of time, with the education and bureaucratic interference from the state, some Aathpahare Rais

themselves forgot their origins and followed Hindu festivals and rituals, which perfectly fit Srinivas's concept of 'sanskritisation'.

6. Conclusion:

The Aathpahare Rais' relationship with Barahakshetra of Dhankuta dates back much earlier and more meaningfully than the records mention, a relationship tied to the roots of Mundhum and ancestors' blood and sweat. The subsequent codifying of the Baraha Purana during the 9th–12th centuries AD and the Hindu cultural and linguistic invasion in the wake of the Gorkhali kingdom turned a pristine Kirat heritage into an exclusively Hindu shrine.

This has overshadowed a rich and beautiful indigenous layer of Nepal's cultural pluralism. It is necessary to reinterpret the history of Barahakshetra and the indigenous Kirat Aathpahare Rais in this present era of democracy and cultural pluralism not only from a mythical Hindu point of view but also from an anthropological and Mundhum point of view so as to conserve Nepal's true multicultural identity.

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Chapter 3: The Cultural and Historical Heart of Dharan: Anthropological and Historical Research on Budha Subba and Dantakali

1. Introduction: The geo-cultural confluence of the hills and the Terai

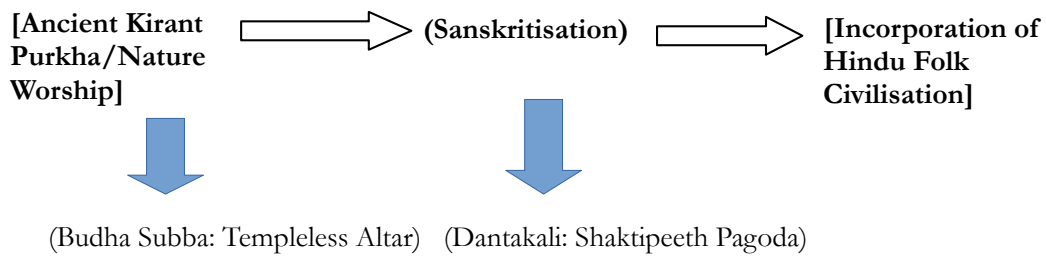
Located at the foothills of the Mahabharat range where it meets the Char-koshe Jhadi (dense forests covering the Terai plains), Dharan, a sub-metropolitan city in the district of Sunsari, eastern Nepal, is equally rich anthropologically and culturally as it is geographically. Anthropologically, Dharan is more than a modern city and commercial hub; it is a unique “living laboratory” of historical accommodation, dialogue and integration of the native indigenous Kirat civilisation and the South Asian Sanatan Hindu religious tradition.

The focus of this convergence of geography and culture is Bijayapur Danda, which hosts two historical cultural centres just few hundred metres apart on the same hill: Budha Subba and Dantakali. At the first glance these two places are considered to be the sites of two separate sects: the abode of the nature-worshipping, ancestors-worshipping indigenous Kirats (Rai-Limbu) and one of the main Shaktipeeths of the Sanatan Hindus rooted in the Vedic Puranic literature. Nevertheless, ethnographic studies demonstrate that they are not independent entities but rather two sides of the same coin that constitute the sociocultural tapestry of eastern Nepal.

From the yard of Bijayapur, Budha Subba represents the native identity of children of the soil who have an association with nature and a reflection of our hunter-gatherer past and the spirituality of open skies devoid of structures of worship. In opposition to this, Dantakali represents cosmic dance, Sanskritisation, and an all-encompassing religion in the form of temple architecture and an established power centre. This research paper attempts to analyse in depth the folklore, history, politico-cultural transformations, and contemporary socio-cultural relevance of both the monuments from an anthropological and historiographical point of view.

2. Budha Subba: Nature worship, Ancestor Worship and the Anthropology of a topless bamboo

Budha Subba not only represents a place of worship but also a unique and living aspect of indigenous Kirat philosophy. Situated on the hilltops of Bijayapur, Budha Subba is considered to be a world-renowned, unique site of worship for its apparent lack of brick-and-stone structure and deity idols made of metal or concrete – unlike traditional religious sites. Instead, the central place of worship is nature itself, and the worship focuses upon a clump of bamboo and a mound of soil.



2.1 Physical and biological characteristics:

Bamboo without tops (Budha Subba Bamboo Phenomenon)

The most distinctive physical identity of the Budha Subba area is the bamboo (scientific name: Bamboospecies). The bamboos growing in this area do not have tops. Although from a botanical point of view it is assumed that this may be due to the specific chemical properties of the soil or the influence of some microorganism, its explanation in the local folk consciousness and cultural environment is purely spiritual and historical.

According to the local indigenous Rai and Limbu communities, this bamboo plant is so connected to the indigenous system of the region that if its trunk or cane is uprooted and planted elsewhere, it will sprout shoots like normal bamboo, but as long as it remains within this specific perimeter of Bijayapur, it will only develop as a stump without a shoot. In anthropology, this is called "cultural ecology". It is seen as a process where a society makes a physical or natural object an integral part of its history and identity.

2.2 Native roots:

The agony of the hunter, Mundhum's nonviolence legend, and Budha Subba's life and origins relate to the stories and popular histories of the Kirat (primarily Yakthung/Limbu and Khambu/Rai) community. Folk stories state that once, in the past, when Bijayapur was a deep forested area, lived a great and brave Kirat hunter named 'Budha Subba', a master of archery, with his sister 'Rima' (Huma in some tales). Every day, they would go hunting for animals and birds in the forests of Bijayapur. The arrow felled the crow. In Kirat culture and Mundhum beliefs, the crow is considered a messenger, a symbol of ancestors, and a sacred bird. The killing of a crow was considered an insult to both nature and ancestors and a sign of great inauspiciousness. This incident deeply traumatised the hunter's consciousness. Regret, self-blame, and a sudden spiritual realisation. Because of this, he made the tough decision to give up violent hunting forever from that moment on.

He buried his powerful bow in the ground and broke off the sharp tip of the arrow, which declared the end of the violence within him. He then sat in deep samadhi, or meditation, at that very spot. According to Kirat folklore:

- The topless bamboo trees seen today on the Budha Subba Temple premises have grown from the bows and broken arrows buried by those hunters.
- The arrowheads are broken, so they don't have bamboo tips.

- This story indicates the historical transition of Kirat society from a hunter-gatherer era to an agricultural and peaceful spiritual era.

From an anthropological perspective, Budha Subba is not dead, but rather he has become 'Khangsam' (ground-up) and merged into the earth. Therefore, this place is not a place to worship an imaginary god but rather a great ancestor who chose peace over violence and became one with nature. There should be a memorial too.

2.3 Original Tradition: Idolless Altar and Indigenous Worship System

The worship of Budha Subba is completely different from the established Brahmanical rituals and has a primitive and indigenous character. For centuries, there were no man-made idols of metal or stone here. Devotees worshipped on a mound of earth (which is considered the burial place of ancestors) as an altar. The site traditionally has a sacrificial system, in which piglets, chickens, and domesticated animals (tongba/thing) and ginger are offered. These items are essential elements of Kirat rituals (such as Sakela or Udhauli-Ubhauli).

According to anthropologist Chemjong (2003), nature and ancestors are paramount in Kirat religion. The absence of a roof in the Buddha Subba temple and the placement of the deity under the open sky reflect a deep indigenous ecological philosophy that this universe is the true temple of God and that He cannot be confined within four walls. It expresses. Although some of its external appearance has changed in the present day, its inner spirit is still based on the traditions of the native sons of the land.

3. Dantkali: Vedic mythological epics, Shakta tradition and cultural architecture

The Dantakali temple complex begins just a few hundred metres from the organic and natural environment of Budha Subba. Despite its geographical proximity, this site transports one into a completely different religious and philosophical environment. Dantakali connects Dharan and the entire eastern Nepal to the 'Shakta' (power worship) network of the larger South Asian Hindu religion.

3.1 Mythological Origins:

Story of Sati Devi and Geography of 51 Shaktipeeths The story of the division of Sati Devi and Lord Shiva is narrated in ancient Hindu texts, including Shri Swasthani Vrat Katha, Devi Bhagwat Purana, and Shiva Purana. The story goes that on receiving disrespect from Lord Shiva, her husband, during a yagna initiated by her father, Daksha Prajapati, Sati Devi set herself on fire by jumping into the yagna kunda. Carrying Sati's dead body, the grief-stricken and enraged Shiva began to perform a Tandava dance in the universe, which put the entire universe in danger.

To protect the creation and dispel Shiva's delusion, Lord Vishnu slowly dismembered Sati's dead body with his Sudarshana Chakra. The limbs fell at 51 different places in the subcontinent, and wherever the limbs fell, a 'Shaktipeetha' was established. This is the Mahakhyana(Grand Narrative)According to legend, the tooth of Sati Devi fell on this hill in Bijayapur, hence the name 'Dantakali'.

In anthropological language, this process is called "mapping sacred geography". It is said

that the religious texts at the centre connect the distant local mountains and hills with their larger religious universe. They include it inside.

3.2 When architecture meets geology...

The Worship of rocks The Dantakali Temple, architecture-wise, is another typical Nepalese pagoda-style temple, which was built in 1900. While most of the parts have been remodified over time using modern technology, its nave and foundation still remain ancient. There is no man-made idol of the traditional goddess in the inner sanctum of the temple, but instead there is a natural stone (Shila), which is covered with silver jalap. The shape of the stone looks exactly like the ridge of a human tooth.

This is a common feature of religious architecture in eastern Nepal and the entire Himalayan region, which anthropologists have termed "geographical deification". It is said that the unique geographical shape created by nature here is worshipped as the physical form of divine power. The large fair held during Dashain and Navratri in Dantakali and the worship performed using Tantric methods prove how deep the influence of the Shakta sect is in this region.

3.3 Academic and Historiographic Perspective:

Political History and Acculturation of Bijayapur

Apart from being a sacred religious site, Bijayapur Danda in Dharan was also the political heart of mediaeval and early modern eastern Nepal (Limbuwan/Morang kingdom). The political history and acculturation of this region play a major role in the present form of Budha Subba and Dantakali.

The capital of Limbuwan and the legacy of Yuma Sammang

According to historian Iman Singh Chemjong (2003), Bijayapur was the capital and powerful administrative centre of the historical Limbuwan or Morang kingdom before the unification of Nepal by the Gorkha kingdom in the 18th century. In the Kirat Yakthung culture, Bijayapur was not only an administrative fort but also the seat of their supreme folk goddess or omnipresent mother power, 'Yuma Sammang'. 'And it was like a sacred 'Shangri-La' that called upon the spirits of ancestors. Mabuhang and Dhungel (n.d.) Historical research shows that the Sen kings (such as Lohang Sen) shared power with local Kirat subbas and chautarias when they ruled eastern Nepal. This political agreement was not limited to tax collection but also had a profound impact on the cultural and religious spheres.

3.4 Academic analysis

The sanctity of Dharan's Dantakali Temple, which is today listed among the 51 Shaktipeeths of Hinduism, demonstrates the harmony between Kirat philosophy and the wider Hindu community. According to Chemjong, the Mundhum texts of the Limbu caste considered Bijayapur Danda a sacred place for worshipping their main ancestor goddess, 'Yuma Sammang'.

Throughout history, the importance of this site has been linked to the political geography of the Morang kingdom. According to Mabuhang and Dhungel, Bijayapur was the capital of the Kirat or Limbuwan kingdom before its unification in the 18th century. The Kirats

did not consider the hills and mounds of Bijayapur merely administrative centers. These were sacred 'power places' or temples where the then society, together with their forefathers, had made pleas in the name of Yuma Sammam. According to Subba (1995), the Sen and Shah dynasties have Sanskritised local gods/spirits so as to associate them with Hindu gods for bringing them under the fold of Hindu society and culture. They made this place as a temple dedicated to Yuma Sammam or similar goddess or spirit and there is a hindu legend about Sati's tooth being dropped in this place, but Kirat legend believes Mahadev and Parvati visited eastern hills and wore the guise of Kirat hunters. According to Limbu folk, here is a holy place for 'Theba Sammam' (grandfather) and 'Yuma Sammam' (grandmother), which are the forms of Lord Shiva and Parvati. According to Genzle (2002), Dantakali and Budha Subba are physical manifestations of the same ancestors.

This shared heritage has created a special religious atmosphere in Dharan. Hindus and Kirats visit the same place, although they understand it in their own ways. According to Koirala (2018), preserving the heritage of Yuma Sammam within the Dantakali complex is important for the historical connection of the Morang region. This makes the temple a historical book, showing the meeting point of the local culture of the hills and the culture that came later.

3.5 Interaction: How two places coexist

The Connection between Budha Subba and Dantakali

The connection between Budha Subba and Dantakali is the perfect example of how the indigenous traditions and Vedic tradition mingle in eastern Nepal. Both go on a single pilgrimage: Almost all those that arrive in Dharan to visit have one particular path to take. Many start off with their visits at Dantakali to make the most of the visit to the goddess Jagat Janani Devi.

Later on, they'll then journey to pay a visit to Budha Subba to make the most of their visit to the protector ancestor of the neighbourhood.

Different Forms of Ritual: The kinds of prayers made to Budha Subba have adapted over the years. Though the tradition continues with sacrifice with the Kirats, many followers of Hinduism visit Budha Subba to provide bouquets, incenses, and coconuts. Nowadays, one new tradition is gaining tremendous acceptance: "writing names on bamboo." By way of writing on stones and makers, young partners and pupils scribble their names on bamboo poles. They believe that doing so will make their love immortal or help them pass exams. Although this has had some impact on the lifespan of the bamboo, it also shows that the site is a "living" place that is changing according to the desires of the new generation.

Below is a timeline of political and cultural changes in the Bijayapur region:

- 17th-early 18th centuries: Kirat autonomy and the rise of the Sen dynasty
- Bijayapur was established as the capital of the Morang kingdom. The Sen kings appointed local Kirat chieftains as Chautaria (prime minister) and Bhardar. During this period, the indigenous 'Yuma Sammam and ancestor worship (Budha Subba) and the harmony between Hinduism began.

- 1774 (1831 BS): Gorkha unification and the fall of Bijayapur

Amidst the relations between Sikkim and the local Limbuwan rulers, the Gorkha army

conquered Bijayapur. Bijayapur's administrative importance fell under the control of the central state, which brought about major changes in its demographic and religious structure.

- 19th century (Rana and Shah periods): Rapid wave of sanskarisation and institutionalization of temples

- The settlement of Brahmin, Kshetri, and Newar communities increased in the Bijayapur area. While maintaining the local Kirat ancestral and natural sites (Budha Subba), Dantakali received royal protection and was integrated into the national mainstream of 51 Shaktipeeths.

3.6 Sanskritisation and the process of religious conversion

According to anthropologists Prof. Prayugraj Sharma (2004) and Chaitanya Subba (1995), after the unification of Nepal and especially during the Rana period, many indigenous deities of eastern Nepal were Hinduised or Sanskritised due to the 'Sanskritisation' (the process by which local or lower-level cultures adopt the so-called higher Hindu or Brahmanical culture and values) adopted by the state.

The most obvious example of this is seen in the interpretations of Dantakali and Budha Subba:

- In the local Limbu Mundhum tradition, Shiva and Parvati are not considered new or outside deities, but rather they are assimilated as their own ancestors, 'Theba Sammamang' (grandfather) and 'Yuma Sammamang' (grandmother).

- The folk tale of Mahaguru Shiva and Goddess Parvati residing in this eastern hilly region as Kirat hunters is found in both the Mundhum and Hindu Puranas.

- According to anthropologist Martin Genzle (2002), Budha Subba and Dantakali are in fact the physical and spiritual continuations of the same indigenous ancestors, who were later rewritten in the Hindu Vedic language.

As Koirala (2018) mentions in his book, "Ancient Morang," maintaining Yuma Sammamang's historical ties is necessary to comprehend the historical and multicultural nature of the Morang region. By the same logic, the mentioned temples are living history books rather than purely religious sites that communicate stories of integration, mutual acceptance, and negotiations between ethnicity and the national stream in Nepal.

4. Sociological Interaction: A 'Living Bridge' Between Two Sites

The most beautiful aspect of Budha Subba and Dantakali is the contemporary social, cultural, and religious interaction between them. In modern Nepal, where social distancing sometimes seems to be increasing in the name of identity and religion, these two sites in Dharan are presenting a strong example of communal harmony and plurality.

4.1 Culture of shared pilgrimage

No pilgrim or tourist visiting Dharan or Bijayapur can complete their journey without visiting both these places. A Hindu devotee, who offers water to the tooth relic of the Goddess on Dantakali and worships it according to Tantric rituals, reaches Budha Subba a few minutes

later, burns incense on the mound of earth there, and ties a thread at the base of a bamboo.

Similarly, while the Kirat people worship their ancestors and nature in Budha Subba, they also worship the mother goddess Dantakali with equal respect. In anthropology, this is called "religious hybridity." It is said to be where two different ideologies coexist peacefully without conflicting with each other.

Characteristic /Dimension	Budha Subba	Dantakali
Original philosophical text	Kirat Mundhum, nature worship, ancestral memory	Sanatan Hindu literature, Shakta sect
Physical aspect	An open altar without a temple, a bamboo pole without a top	Traditional pagoda-style temple
Center of worship	Mounds of soil and living vegetation (bamboo)	Natural rock (symbol of Sati Devi's tooth)
Traditional Bhog/Prasad	Pork, chicken, ginger, homemade ginger	Coconut, fruits, trees, Panchabali (on special festivals)
Historical relationship	Relics of the Limbuwan ancestors/hunter era	State religious network during the Sen and Shah periods

4.2 Modern Folk Tradition: The Culture of Writing Names on Bamboo and Tying Threads

Culture is not a static thing; it flows like a river. The culture of Budha Subba and Dantakali has also changed in modern times with the desires and technology of the new generation. Until a few years ago, a new and very popular tradition was for young couples to write their names and those of their lover/girlfriend on the bamboo of the Budha Subba temple with a marker or a sharp stone. It had begun. By doing this, the belief that love would be immortal and the relationship between lover and lover would never break was spread among the younger generation.

However, when many people began to carve and write names on bamboo, which seriously affected the biological health of the bamboo and caused the bamboos to dry up, the local management committee banned the writing of names on bamboo. However, human faith and emotion found another way—now devotees and youth tie a sacred thread (raw thread or Rakshabandhan) around the bamboo on the temple premises. From an anthropological perspective, this tradition shows that, despite being an ancient ancestral site, Budha Subba is a 'living and relevant' space that also accommodates the emotional needs, aspirations, and loves of today's digital and modern youth.

5. Conclusion:

The challenge of cultural pluralism and preservation

The history, the anthropological values, the socio-cultural aspects, and the bond and love between castes of eastern Nepal is the main meanings of both Budha Subba and Dantakali, situated on the top of Bijayapur Hill of Dharan. From Budha Subba, we can learn about connecting ourselves with nature, the ways to choose the non-violence path, and love for our

ancestors. From Dantakali, we can know about the supreme divine force, the worship of motherhood (Matrishakti), and artistic and cultural history.

In today's consumerist and modern world, preserving the original form of these sites has become a big challenge. On the one hand, there is the biological challenge of conserving the native bamboos of Budha Subba, and on the other hand, it is necessary to develop tourism while maintaining the historical and archaeological importance of both these sites. To introduce Nepal's multiethnic, multilingual, and multicultural identity to the world, it is the main responsibility of today's generation to further strengthen this 'living bridge' built by heritage sites like Budha Subba and Dantakali between the hills and the Terai and between tribal and Vedic traditions.

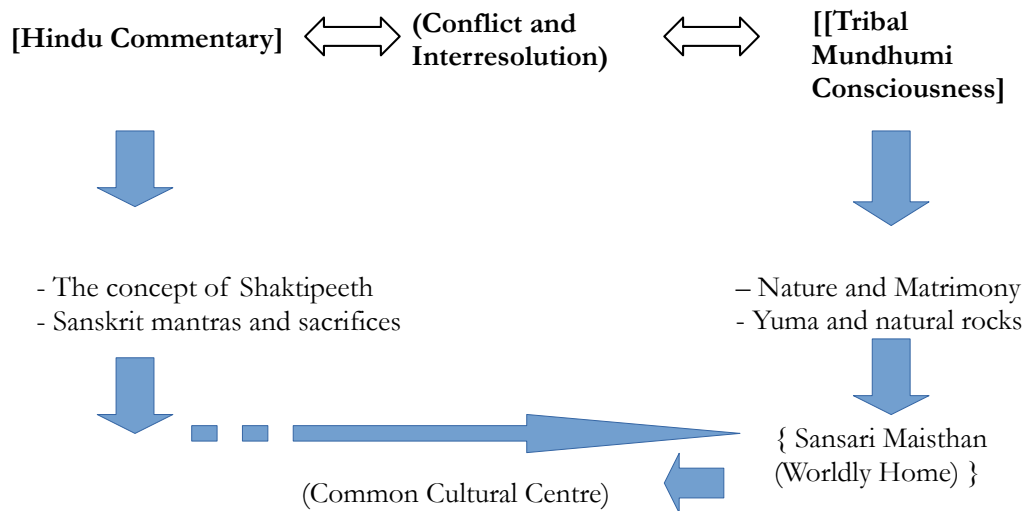
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Chapter 4: Rangeli's Sansari Maisthan: A Place of Coexistence in Eastern Nepal

Introduction: The Limits of Classical Commentary and the Rise of Indigenous Consciousness

A strong, one-sided perspective has long dominated the writing of Nepal's cultural history, which anthropologists call the 'spectrum of Sanskritisation' or the 'classical Hindu discourse' (Sharma, 2004). This linear historiography attempted to read every shrine, stone, and centre of nature as an entity derived purely and only from the Sanskrit scriptures, the Tantric Shaktipeethas, and the incarnations of Vedic deities (goddesses and gods). In the process, the indigenous peoples of the land's oral history, their ages-old, nature-based Mundhum philosophy and traces of matriarchal beliefs are either neglected or subsumed. The “Sansari Maisthan” (Sansari Mai Temple), which stands in the historical Rangeli Municipality of the Morang district of Eastern Nepal, is a case in point to these transfigurations, transgressions and coexistence.



Nowadays, Sansari Maisthan has become a major centre of faith and tourist destination for not only Morang but also domestic and foreign Hindu pilgrims from eastern Nepal and across the border in India, Bihar and Bengal. The current established commentary identifies it as a purely Hindu Shaktipeeth, where the sattvic and fierce forms of Goddess Durga or Kali are imagined. However, if we carefully examine the local folklore, folk tales and cultural relics hidden within this glossy veil of institutional history, it is clear that its historical and spiritual foundation is very deep, primitive and indigenous. Long before the advent and political expansion of Hinduism, this place has been a place of worship for the nature-worshipping Matri Shakti, Vana Devi or the supreme creator mother 'Yuma Sammamang' described in the Limbu Mundhum. the

original indigenous Kirat (Limbu, Rai, Dhimal, Rajbanshi and Yakkha) communities of this region. (Chemjong, 2003)¹

This research-based study critically analyses contemporary religious practices, their specific geography, and intangible cultural heritage in the Samsari Maisthan. The main objective of this study is to examine how an ancient tribal sacred geography works. Over time, it was incorporated into Hindu tradition under the auspices of the state's political and religious power. This process is considered a very common and ongoing phenomenon in the socio-religious history of Nepal, as anthropologist Assel Michaels (1994) has pointed out the 'Hinduisation' of local gods in his writing; however, it is not simply a lamentation of one religion replacing another. Rather, it is a serious anthropological exploration of how, despite oppression, the indigenous people kept their ancestral identity alive and how this site stands today as a 'coexistent place of worship' of two different religious consciousnesses.

Site Description: Geography, Environment, and Contemporary Culture

The geographical location of Sansari Maisthan is itself very important from a historical and ecological point of view. The temple is located near Rangeli Bazaar, the old commercial centre and infrastructure centre of Morang, about 20 kilometres east of Biratnagar. The area lies just south of the historic postal highway, which has connected various indigenous settlements of the Terai since ancient times. Most noteworthy, the temple is located on the banks of the 'Chisang Khola'. In the folk culture of eastern Nepal, the Chisang Khola is not just a stream of water; it is the river that gave birth to and witnessed the Dhimal, Rajbanshi and Kirat civilisations. (Introduction, 1985)¹

Geo-cultural location of the worldly Maisthan	
Geographical/Environmental Elements	Cultural/Religious Meaning
• The banks of the Chisang River	• Witness to indigenous civilization, river consciousness
• Giant Kavro tree (Ficus)	• The original remnant of nature worship, coolness
• South of the Postal Highway	• Ancient commercial and human connections

The environmental features found in the temple premises make it seem as if its ancient nature-worshipping history still speaks silently today. The main sanctum of the temple is a huge and old kavro tree. (I am a fig tree.) It is located at the foot of the mountain. Before the modern concrete walls were erected, this tree was the temple of the goddess. This ficus tree not only provides a cool and spiritually peaceful environment for devotees, but it also represents the primitive 'forest worship' of South Asian indigenous cultures, which considers trees and plants as the abode of the gods. Gives strong evidence of nature worship.

Currently, the outer shell of this site has been completely transformed into a Hindu Shaktipeeth (Land Nepal, 2020). The goddess who is understood and worshipped daily here is 'Samsari Mai'. Locally and regionally, it is believed that Samsari Mai is extremely kind and equally powerful; she does not let her devotees' sincere wishes, prayers for children, freedom from diseases and family happiness go in vain.

The rituals that take place in this temple today are basically in line with the Tantric and Shakta traditions of Hinduism. The practice of sacrificing goats, geese, and roosters to fulfil vows is very widespread here. This style of sacrifice, on the one hand, reflects the Hindu Shakta faith, and on the other hand, it also indicates the continuity of the ancient sacrificial practice of pleasing nature by offering the blood of indigenous people.

Here, common people come to perform important rituals of their lives like fasting, marriage, and worshipping new vehicles. Especially during the Navratri of Bada Dashain and Chaite Dashain, which fall in Oct-Nov and March-April, there is no place to set foot here. The throng of lakhs of devotees, the sound of the Panchebaja and the blood of the sacrificed animals fill the temple premises with a special energy. However, the eyes of an indigenous researcher are not enough to just look at this crowd. One must listen to the old Kirat voice buried beneath this crowd, which claims this place as its ancestral land.

Kirat Context: Yuma, Mundhum and Sacred Landscapes

To objectively assess the Kirat roots and prehistory hidden within the worldly realm, we must first understand the Kirat religious system, their worldview. And it is important to understand the geo-cultural consciousness. Kirat religion is not a religion based on a written book or a prophet. It is a living oral tradition developed by communities like Limbu, Rai, Yakkha and Sunuwar through thousands of years of interaction with nature, whose core text or philosophy is called Mundhum (Gaenszle, 2000). Mundhum is not just a method of worship; it is a holistic form of history, science, philosophy and the art of living (Kirat Mundhum, 2025).

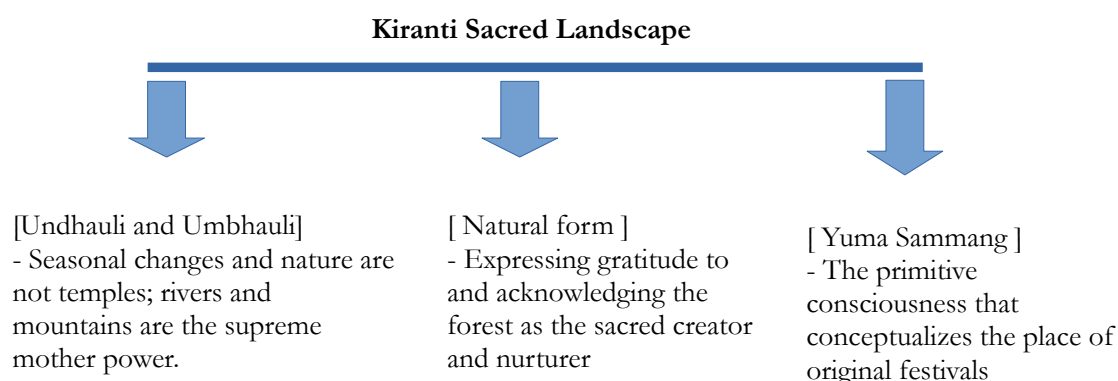
There are two pillars at the centre of Kirat philosophy – nature worship (animism) and ancestor worship. To them, God is neither in a human figure nor a ruling authority in heaven. To them, everything in the universe – air, fire, water, plants, rocks and earth – has a living being with a soul. In the Limbu philosophy, the mother goddess is known as Yuma Sammang.

'Yuma' means 'Bajai' (primaeval mother).

The ultimate creative power, bestower of skills and wisdom and the ultimate power that guards mankind is named Yuma (Chemjong, 2003). It is not in any stone statues within the temple; Yuma resides in each of three stones of a hearth stove, an old tree of a jungle and along the riverbank with some rounded rocks.

Because of this philosophical foundation, the sacred landscape of the Kirats. The concept of a temple is completely different from that of classical Hinduism. Hindu tradition requires grand temples, idols, and the veneration of life for the gods. However, for the Kirat, nature itself is the temple. Their sacred places are often not man-made structures but rather the tops of majestic mountains (manghim), the mouths of glaciers, natural boulders in the middle of

dense forests, or the estuaries of rivers.



Their main festivals, Undhauli (which symbolises the descent of nature and birds downwards in winter) and Umbhauli (which symbolises the time of sowing crops and nature ascending upwards in summer), are based entirely on the changing seasons and gratitude towards the earth (Rai, 2012). The structure of the sacred site of Rangeli, the bank of the Chisang River, the worship at the foot of a huge and ancient Kavro tree, and the presence of no idols but only natural rocks in the early stages, all these features point to a strong possibility that this site was originally a centre of Mundhum nature worship of the Kirat or Dhimal tribes.

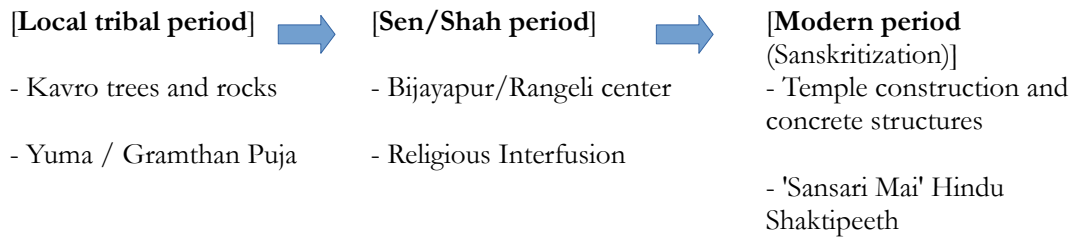
Evaluation of Kirat Relations in the Worldly Context: An Anthropological Discussion

The argument that the Kirat or Raithane ancestors were the first to occupy the worldly Maisthan of Rangeli is not just a sentimental ethnic claim; it is an anthropological conclusion based on the historical, social and demographic realities of eastern Nepal. However, due to the lack of systematic archaeological excavations of this site by the state, no written copperplates or archaeological objects have been made public to date, but the abstract history and social structure strongly support this claim.

Historical Demographics and Land Ownership

The first evidence is the historical demographics of this region. Even during the Sen kingdom and later the early Shah period, the entire territory of Morang and Sunsari was part of the historical Limbuwan or southern Madhes region of the wider Kirat Province (Subba, 1999). Places like Chatra, Rangeli and Bijayapur were administrative and cultural centres of the Kirat kings and the local natives, the Dhimals and Koch Chaudharies.

The presence of old 'gramthans' (collective places for nature worship) of the Dhimals and old settlements of the Kirats around Rangeli even today confirms that the first sweat and the first prayers on the soil here belonged to the indigenous people. When the state brought about changes in the land ownership and administrative structure of the region, the sons of the land were gradually marginalised, and a new religious discourse was imposed on their centres of faith (Bista, 1991).



A mix of name and function (syncretism)

The second important basis is the 'linguistic and cultural fusion of name and function'. The name 'Samsari Mai' is itself quite remarkable. There is no mention of any specific goddess named 'Samsari' in classical Hindu texts or in the Sanskrit Lalita Sahasranama or Durga Saptashati. The word "Samsari" comes from the local vernacular, meaning 'the world-mother (cosmic mother) who governs this material world or earth'. It is said. And "Mother" or "Mai" is a respectful folk word used for mother power.

This concept is in line with the definition of 'Yuma Sammang' in Limbu Mundhum, where Yuma is accepted as the world-mother who protects the entire earth and the human world (Chemjong, 2003). Similarly, animal sacrifices and personal vows are included in the worship performed at the mundane Maisthan. The custom of offering sacrifices is found equally in both the Hindu Shakta tradition and the Mundhum 'Maang' worship of the Kirats. The Kirats offer offerings of a rooster or a goat to appease their ancestral deities or nature, a culture that over time merged with the sacrificial practices of Hinduism, bringing both communities together at one centre.

Cultural dimension	Classical Hindu view	Indigenous perspective
1. Divine form	Goddess Durga / Kali (Tantric Shaktipeeth)	Yuma Sammang / Nature (Mother Universe)
2. Main symbols	Prana-Pratishtha idol, temple in Gajur	Kavro tree, natural ground-rock
3. Ritual method	Sanskrit mantra, Brahmin priest, Chandi recitation	Raithane folk language, sacrificial practices, ancestral remembrance
4. Festivals	Bada Dashain, Navratri, Chaite Dashain	Undhau, Umbhau, Ritu Puja

If we follow what anthropology and Hinduism: Past and Present by Axel Michaels (1994) explains is one of the major tactics of Hinduism's propagation in Nepal, this process is the 'assimilation of local gods'. Hinduism would seek to absorb powerful local gods – Yaksha, Nagas, or goddesses of the forests – by declaring them incarnations of their bigger gods – such as Vishnu, Shiva, and Durga – instead of confronting the natives by resorting to a holy war.

The same process seems to have taken place at the Samsari Maisthan in Rangeli. The sacred rock of an earlier open-air Kirat Yuma or Dhimal village was gradually transformed into a

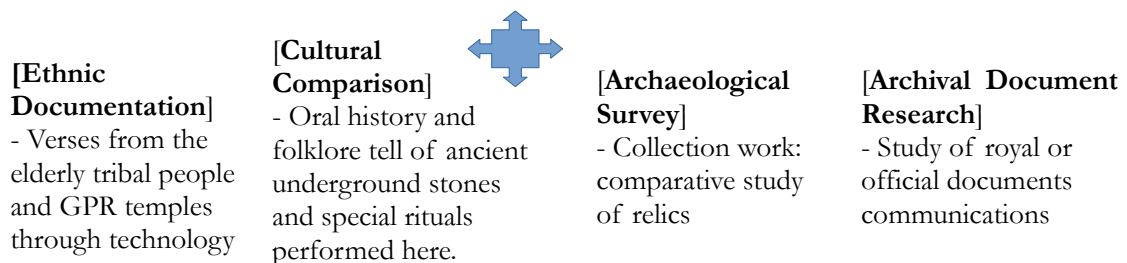
'Samsari Mai' by dressing it with vermillion and cloth. Later, a grand temple building was built there, and Brahmin priests were appointed to chant Sanskrit mantras (Michaels, 1994). This clever process preserved the social and cultural customs (sacrifices and worship) of the local people but completely Hinduised their inner spiritual and philosophical nature. This mixture is a very sensitive but important aspect of Nepal's religious and political history.

Conclusions and future directions of research

In today's reality, the Sansari Maisthan of Rangeli is a thriving, financially strong and widely respected Hindu temple. It cannot be denied that this temple has provided peace of mind and religious confidence to millions of devotees. However, the duty of history and anthropology is not only to applaud the glitter of the present; its main responsibility is also to excavate and bring out the facets of indigenous identity that have been swept away by the tide of time and suppressed by the power of power. The geographical location of this temple, the history of its Kavro tree, its naming and the demographic background of the area strongly indicate that this site was built on a sacred site of the historical Kirat or indigenous tribes at some time. There is a high possibility that this site may be associated with the Mundhum Matri Shakti Yuma Sammang, which was transformed into a common Hindu Shaktipeeth through the process of Sanskritisation over time.

To academically confirm this scientific assumption and folk history and to make Nepal's culture truly balanced and profound, a multidisciplinary study will be conducted in the coming days. There is a need for more in-depth research from this perspective. For this, the following four research directions can be identified:

Four pillars of future research



1. Ethnic and oral documentation: An oral record of the pre-Hindu history of the temple, the folklore heard by their ancestors, and the old indigenous names associated with the place should be prepared by conducting lengthy interviews with the very elderly elders, old Mangbas, and Dhamis of the indigenous Kirat, Dhimal, and Rajbanshi communities of Rangeli and its surroundings.

2. In-depth comparative analysis of rituals: Structural similarities should be sought between some of the traditional pujas performed on special days of the year in the worldly Maisthan (which differ from the established Hindu system) and the verses of nature worship described in the Kirat Mundhum. This may identify the abstract indigenous philosophy hidden within the temple.

3. Modern archaeological surveys: Ground-penetrating radar to determine the historical antiquity of the temple without damaging the physical structure (GPR) Using modern

technologies such as geophysical methods, ancient underground remains, the structure of ancient rocks, and ancient foundations should be explored. This will provide scientific evidence of the physical history of the temple.

4. Archives and Document Research: The Land Revenue Office of the Government of Nepal, the Department of Archaeology, the old documents of the Sen kings, the red seals of the time of Prithvi Narayan Shah, and the historical documents (paper documents, rukkas, and sanads) of the Rana period, regarding the Guthi of this land and temple of Rangeli, should be seriously searched and reinterpreted.

This multifaceted research methodology will not only bring out the true history of the mundane Maisthan but will also reveal the complex, multifaceted religious structure of the entire nation of Nepal. It will serve as a milestone in understanding the history of the country and preventing it from being isolated and making it truly inclusive and balanced. Sansari Maisthan is a living laboratory of cultural coexistence. historical transformation and indigenous awakening in contemporary Nepal.

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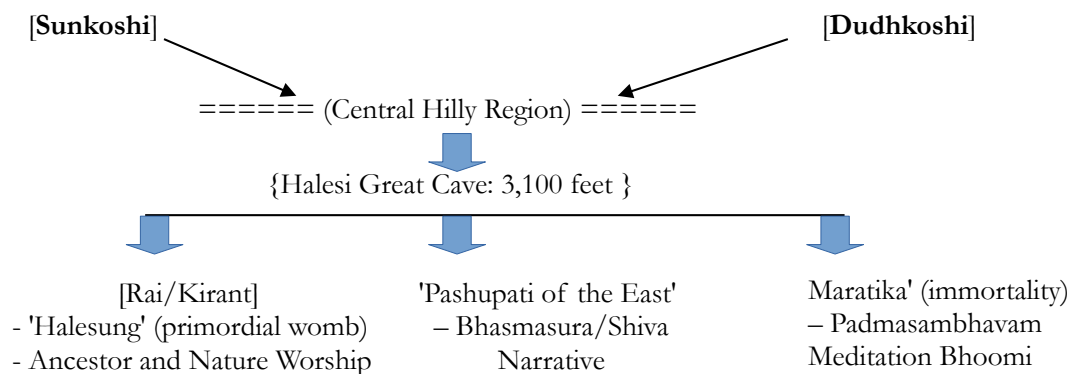
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Chapter 5: Halesi – Sacred Labyrinth of the East: Anthropological Excavation of Tri-Religious Coexistence and Indigenous Mundhum Geography

1. Introduction to the Temple: Where Rock, Narrative, and Consciousness Unite

To understand the geo-cultural essence of the eastern hilly region of Nepal, it is essential to study a primitive, immaterial and powerful natural energy centre located in the middle of the Khotang district. This sacred land is Halesi. Situated at the intersection of two great watercourses – the Dudhkoshi and Sunkoshi rivers – this area has been the main centre guiding the spiritual consciousness of the entire eastern Nepal since prehistoric times. Halesi is not an artificial structure of brick, cement, iron or man-made physical architecture. It is a limestone formation built in the womb of the mid-hill Mahabharata range, at an altitude of about 3,100 feet above sea level. It is a vast and awe-inspiring natural cave system.

When a modern tourist comes here. His gaze is superficial and uncultured. To him, this land may seem like just a large cave or hole formed due to geological movements. But history is different. For the indigenous people and devotees of various religious backgrounds who have lived in this area for thousands of years, this place is not ordinary. For them, it is the navel of the entire universe and the highest centre of consciousness.



In established discourses of Nepali national history and tourism, Halesi is often simplified as "Pashupatinath of the East". (Gaudel, 2020). This is not all there is to the history and multiplicity of this place. The process of Hinduisation, which goes by the name of Halesi, is just one facet of its multiple identity. These unique landscapes of sacredness can be counted on the fingers of this earth. The one and few places in this world where three systems and philosophies of religion, namely the native indigenous Kirat Mundhum, the Sanatan Hinduism and the Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism having separate history live and breathe in the same geography, the same

rock, and the same cave without ever having fought any religious war and conflicts (Buffetrille, 1994).

This place is a jumble of cultural intermingling where the culture power nexus through history changed its outlook but never challenged the very sanctity of this geography. The pilgrims arrive with their language and sight, rite and tradition and offer prayer to the same earth and carry back their own ritualities with them.

2. Primitive Roots: Indigenous Kirat Heritage and the Discourse of 'Halesung'

Centuries before the words "Mahadev" or "Shiva" echoed in these green hills and cliffs of Khotang, this land was protected by Kirat ancestors. Long before lamas from Tibet or Buddhist and Vedic masters from India and the Kathmandu Valley came to this remote mountain, Halesi Mahagufa was the oldest spiritual and social cornerstone of Kirat civilisation (Karki, 2018). Mainstream historiography in South Asia has always overlooked this pre-historical ownership of the indigenous people, because the history of the indigenous people was not in any copperplate or written text, but was preserved in their oral epic Mundhum (Subba, 1999).

The core of Kirat religion and philosophy is the worship of nature and ancestors. For them, God is not a human king or a metal statue locked in a temple sanctum.

Mundhum Worldview

According to the theory, nature is the real force, and man is just an inseparable part of that nature. According to the Kirat (especially Rai) scholars and elders of this region, the original and real name of this place is "Halesung" (Karki, 2018). Historical etymology of the Kirat Rai (Chamling or Bantawa) language When examined, 'Halesung' means "hollow land", "cave" or "primitive area of the ancestors". This cave was no ordinary den for them; it was literally the womb of Mother Earth. It is believed that human civilisation and the Kirat ancestors originated from there (Subba, 1999)..

'Halesung' (Kiranti Mundhumi Heritage)	
• Philosophical basis:	worship of eternal nature and ancestors (No Anthropomorphic Idols)
• Primitive ancestral spirits:	Raibi and Maibi (carriers of hunting, farming and gathering)
• Limestone figures:	Not Shivalingas, but 'bones of the earth' and the physical presence of ancestors
• Ritual medium:	The sound of drums and cymbals, recitation of Samlo, offering of ginger, grain and jaggery

According to the Mundhum myth, in this great cave, in the primaeval age, the immaterial spirits of two main ancestors named Raibi and Maibi resided (Pathak, 2012). They taught the ancient Kirat people of the jungle hunting rules, the techniques of farming on the cliffs, and the dance of Sakela/Sakewa (Sili), which is a dance of gratitude to nature, to the ancient Kirat people of the jungle age. The Kirat never saw the natural formations of the unique limestone in the caves as a male deity or the lingam of Shiva. For them, those formations were the "bones of the earth". And they were ancient relics of the physical presence of their primitive

ancestors (Karki, 2018).

Even in modern times, when the cycle of nature changes twice a year, during the Undhauri and Umbhauri festivals, Kirat Dhamis (Nakso, Mubia, and Rayangkumi) from all over eastern Nepal gather in the Halesi Mahagufa in their traditional attire, playing drums and cymbals. In the dark corners of the cave, as they chant rhythmic Mundhum mantras (Samlo), calling upon the spirits of their ancient ancestors, makes the atmosphere there wild and primitive.

An interesting and eye-opening scene is seen when, on one side of the temple, state-appointed Vedic priests are performing aarti to 'Mahadev' with Sanskrit mantras by lighting incense and lamps, while at the same time, Kirats are offering arghya (tongba/ponghi) of raw ginger, new grains, and sacred yams, invoking nature in their own mother tongue (Pathak, 2012). What this scene proves is that written history, even if it changes names, cannot erase the thousands of years old beliefs that flow in the blood of Indigenous people.

3. Hindu story: Shiva's refuge and the Sanskritisation of sacred geography

When the Malla kings of the Kathmandu Valley and later the Shah dynasty's Gorkhali kingdom expanded eastward in the mediaeval period, along with the strategic conquests, a strong religious and cultural undertaking also took place, known in anthropology as 'Sanskritisation' (Bista, 1991). In the course of this political-religious expansion, the epic of Sanatan Hinduism was delicately applied to the form of the primitive Kirat 'Halesung' of Halesi. For this transformation, a very popular and dramatic story of Hindu mythology—the story of Bhasmasura and Shiva—was linked to this geography.

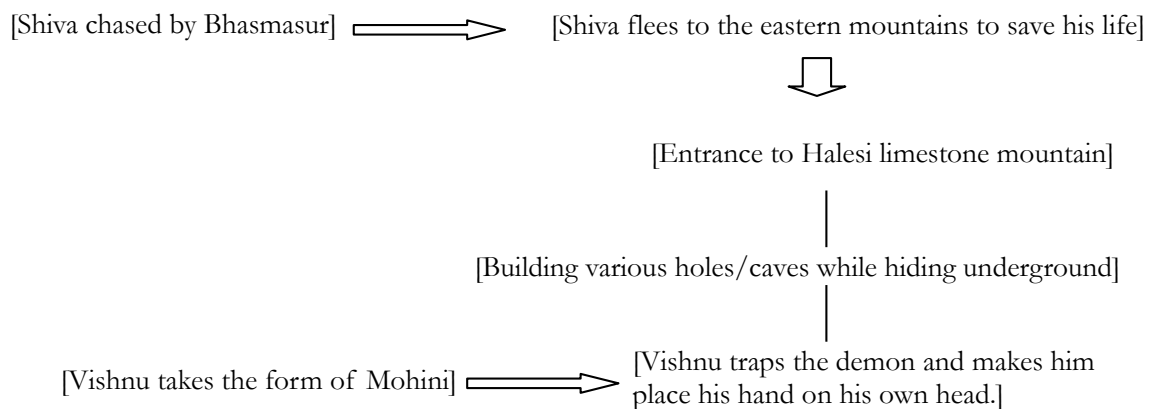
According to legend, Bhasmasura, a mighty and ambitious demon, similar to Hiranyaksha or Mahishasura, performed years of severe penance to please Lord Shiva. Shiva, who was quick to please, invited him to appear before him and ask for a boon. Bhasmasura asked for a miraculous and devastating boon: "Whoever I place my hand on with my palms spread out, let him immediately burn to ashes (bhasma)." Shiva, without any foresight, replied, "So be it."

As soon as he received the boon, the evil demon became sinful and started chasing Shiva with the aim of abducting Lord Shiva's consort Parvati and becoming the all-powerful being in the world. Trapped by his own boon, the god of gods Shiva left Kailash and fled to hide in the mountains, caves and forests of Matryaloka to save his life (Schöttli, 2014).

It was during this time that Shiva entered the limestone mountain of Halesi, located in the remote mountainous region of eastern Nepal. It is said that when he suddenly dug into the ground and tried to hide, deep holes, strange tunnels, and intricate paths of tunnels were formed inside the cave. To save Shiva from this great crisis, Lord Vishnu took the form of Mohini, the most beautiful woman in the universe. Mohini stood at the entrance of the Halesi cave and trapped Bhasmasura in her form and challenged him to a dance competition.

The demon, who was blinded by lust, could not understand Mohini's movements. Whatever physical postures and hand gestures (mudras) Mohini made during the dance, Bhasmasura also imitated them without thinking. In the last phase of the dance, Mohini very cleverly placed her right hand on her own head. The demon also lost consciousness and put his hand on his own head. Due to the power of the boon, he immediately turned into a terrible flame

and became ashes (Schöttli, 2014). Even today, Hindu pilgrims believe with great reverence that the black mud or ash-like substance found on the floor and walls of the Halesi cave is the remains of the same demon Bhasmasura.



Hindu transformation of sacred geography

This story transformed the physical geography of Halesi into a complete Hindu spiritual map. Every natural stalagmite within the cave. The stones were given the names of Hindu gods and goddesses (Pathak, 2012):

- **Halesi Mahadev Linga:** A huge natural limestone rock in the centre of the cave, which is worshipped as a real Shivalinga.
- **Sati Devi (Mother Earth):** A distinctive part of the cave ceiling, where the limestone has melted and formed the shape of a woman's breast or figure, believed to be the fallen limbs of Sati Devi or the breasts of Mother Earth, leaking milk.
- **Basaha Cave:** Another long tunnel located just opposite the main cave, known as the hiding place or Basaha Cave, is where Shiva's vehicle 'Nandi' (bull).
- **Sin and Dharma Test Path:** Narrow rocky passages inside the cave, through which devotees have to crawl or cling to the walls. It is believed that only a person who is 'sinless' and has a pure heart can easily pass through this narrow passage, and anyone with sin in their heart will get stuck here (Pathak, 2012). In fact, it is a unique combination of human physical flexibility, mental balance, and geo-cultural beliefs.

4. Buddhist story: Maratika, the cave of immortal life and victory over death

Completely different from the Hindu and Kirat interpretations, for the Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhist sect, Halesi's identity is linked to a different, higher spiritual dimension. Tibetan, Bhutanese and Ladakhi Buddhists call this place 'Maratika Caves' (Buffetrille, 1994). In Tibetan, the literal meaning of 'Maratika' is "the place of the abolition of death" or "the land of immortal life". In Vajrayana Buddhist philosophy, Halesi (Maratika) is given the same high academic and spiritual importance as Boudhanath in Kathmandu, Swayambhu, and Lumbini in Rupandehi because this cave is associated with the greatest Siddha Purusha in Buddhist history (Ricard, 1994).

According to historical and religious texts, in the 8th century CE (800s), the great tantric master Padmasambhava (known to Tibetans as Guru Rinpoche or the second Buddha) and his spiritual companion and Indian princess Mandarava arrived at this remote mountain cave in eastern Nepal while travelling from the Indian subcontinent to Tibet to spread Buddhism (Ricard, 1994). They use this secluded and naturally energetic cave not just for simple meditation but for the 'practice of immortality', which is liberation from the cycle of life and death. It was considered the best land for long-life Sadhana.

[Guru Padmasambhavam and Princess Mandarva]



{Secret meditation in the Marathi cave}



[Disclosure of the Ayuca Deity Amitabha Buddha]



['Immortality' by Amrit Kalash (Chimé) boon to]

According to the texts, they spent months in this cave, completely disconnected from the outside world, meditating in secret. At the peak of their spiritual practice, Amitabha Buddha, the god of universal life and eternal light, appeared inside the cave himself. Buddha Amitabha, pleased with their devotion and spiritual practice, poured out the pot of nectar in his hand. He poured nectar on their heads and gave them the 'state of immortality' of complete victory over death. Who gave the blessing? (Buffetrille, 1994). Therefore, for the Buddhist world, Halesi is not an ordinary pilgrimage site; it is a spiritual laboratory for conquering the fear of death forever.

Physical signs of the Guru

Buddhist pilgrims find numerous physical manifestations of Guru Rinpoche's living presence in the natural formations within the cave (Ricard, 1994):

1. Body marks and footprints: There are some pits on the rocky walls and floor of the cave, which are believed to be the marks made by Guru Rinpoche's knees, palms, and khukuri while meditating or engaging in spiritual warfare with demons.

2. Pot of nectar (Tshebum): The roof of the cave has a calabash-like shape made of melted limestone, from which drops of water drip 24 hours a day. Buddhists do not consider this water to be ordinary water; they consider it to be the 'nectar' of Amitabha Buddha. They collect it in an urn with great care and accept it as an offering for their long life.

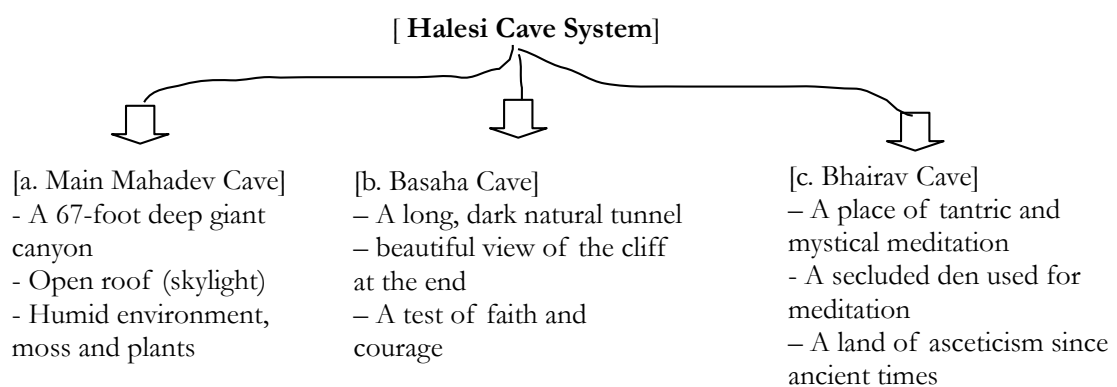
3. Five Wisdom Dakinis: The five natural rock pillars in different corners of the cave are the five primordial goddesses who protect Guru Rinpoche. Who are worshipped as wisdom dakinis.

Due to this historical belief, every year during the winter season, thousands of lamas and monks from Tibet, the Bhutanese Himalayan region, Ladakh, Sikkim, and the Sherpa, Tamang, and Gurung communities of Nepal perform 'Ayu Puja' at Halesi (long-life ceremony/Tshewang).

They come to do so. For them, breathing the fresh air of Halesi means prolonging their lifespan and immortalising their spiritual consciousness.

5. Architectural and geological features: The outline of a natural labyrinth

Halesi is not just a cave; it is a natural architectural and geological wonder. It is a network of wonders. According to anthropological and geological studies, this cave system is called 'karst'. It was formed by a process where the chemical reactions of water over millions of years eroded limestone, creating tunnels and vast chambers underground. There are mainly three large and distinctive caves within the Halesi complex, whose physical structure gives people a mysterious spiritual feeling (Pathak, 2012).



A. Main Halesi Cave (Mahadev Cave)

This is the largest and main cave in the complex. Its structure is very unique; it looks like a huge chasm located about 67 feet below the ground surface. The middle of the roof of this cave is open, which can be called a natural window. When the first rays of the sun enter through the hole in the roof and fall on the natural rock in the dark corner of the cave in the early morning, the sight of the light generated there looks very supernatural and divine. The environment inside the cave is always damp and cold. Due to the continuous seepage of water, green moss and various types of ancient plants grow on the rocks. Trees have grown up, giving this place a look like a prehistoric forest.

B. Basaha Cave

Located a few metres from the main cave, Basaha Cave is a long, dark, and straight natural tunnel. It is completely dark inside this tunnel and one has to move forward only with the help of one's own umbrella or torch. The greatest feature of this tunnel is that it ends right at the mouth of a large cliff, from where the green mountain scenery and sky outside suddenly appear. This physical journey from darkness to light suddenly acts as a spiritual metaphor for taking human consciousness 'from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge' (tamaso ma jyotirgamaya). Walking this cave is an amazing test of human courage and the power of nature.

C. The gates of righteousness and the gates of sin

The inner sections of the cave have narrow stone passages, which are locally called 'Dharmadwar', 'Papadwar', 'Swargadwar' or 'Bhairavadwar'. These are not man-made doors, but rather narrow openings formed by the melting of limestone.

For devotees, crossing these gates is not just a physical exercise; it is an ancient and indigenous psychological ritual to test one's spiritual strength and the purity of one's actions. This natural formation of limestone has played a major role in making the religious discourse of the temple even more mysterious and interesting.

6. Cultural Synthesis: A 'Living Bridge' and its Socio-Economic Impact

In many parts of the world where different religions collide in one place, rivers of blood have often flowed, temples have been demolished to build mosques or churches, and attempts have been made to erase history. But Halesi in eastern Nepal is a rare and wonderful exception in the world, where in thousands of years of history there has never been a single minor religious war or riot between Kirats, Hindus, and Buddhists (Schöttli, 2014). This place is a cultural synthesis. It is such a living bridge, one that proudly presents the Nepali essence of unity in diversity to the world.

If one were to look inside the Halesi Mahagufa early in the morning, one would hear the most beautiful music of human civilisation. In one area of the limestone cavern, Hindu devotees ring brass bells, sending echoes of 'Om Namah Shivaya' bouncing off the old walls. A few steps off, Buddhist monks of the Himalayas don a maroon cloak and chanting the 'Om Mani Padme Hum', with a soothing monotone rhythmically hang a white khada above that same sacred place. What the Hindu pilgrims consider as the sacred Shivalinga rock this stalagmite formation represents to the Buddhists as the 'Tshebum' – The urn of eternity. And at the entrance of the temple, Kirat shamans are reciting the Mundhum Samlo to the beat of drums and offering ginger arghya (Buffetrille, 1994).

Here, Hindus respect Buddhist lamas, and Buddhists respect Hindu beliefs. Buddhists worship the Shivalinga as the 'meditation rock of Guru Rinpoche', while Hindus bow to the statue of Guru Rinpoche as an 'incarnation of Vishnu' or a great sage. This religious harmony is not the result of any written law or state pressure, but rather a way of life that the people of this mountainous region have developed over centuries by accepting each other's existence.

Socio-economic impact

The triple-religion beliefs have greatly affected the socio-economic condition of this isolated hill. Khotang's market, which was quite far away from the road network today, has become an economic centre of the eastern region of Nepal (Gaudel, 2020). The goods seen in the market around Halesi Temple also reflect the multicultural character of the place:

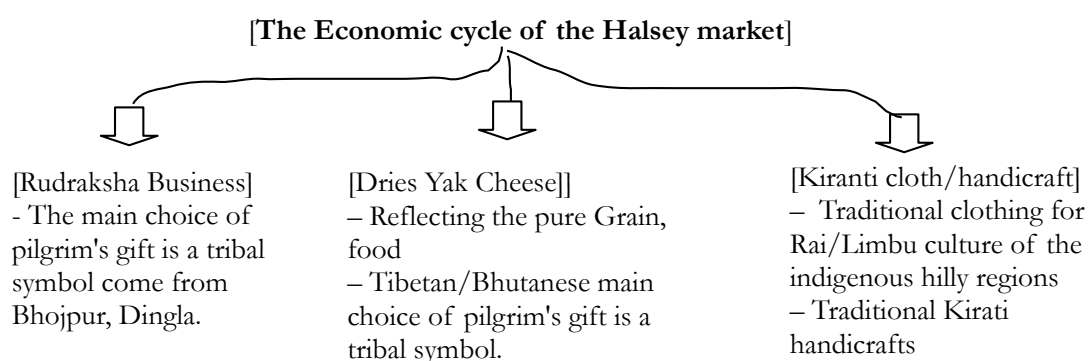
- **Rudraksha seeds:** There is a large trade here in precious Rudraksha beads, which grow in the hills of the neighbouring districts of Bhojpur and Dingla, which Hindu pilgrims buy as the tears of Shiva and sacred garlands.

- **Yak hide and herbs:** The sale of hard curds, bhirmah, and Himalayan herbs made

from yak milk brought from the Himalayan region and high mountains is widespread here, which are especially taken as koseli by Bhutanese and Tibetan Buddhist tourists.

- **Kirat handicrafts and textiles:** Traditional Kirat cloths, waka (waistbands), and tribal chinos woven on home looms by local Rai and Limbu women are found here, reminding tourists of the original identity of this land.

In this way, Halesi has not only connected the human spirit; it has also energised the economic lives of the region's poor mountain dwellers.



7. Contemporary Challenges and the Politics of Conservation: The Indigenous Crisis

When any religious site undergoes rapid modernisation and commercialisation, some serious crises also come with it. Halesi is facing this transitional crisis today. With the development of infrastructure and the expansion of the mid-hill highway, the number of tourists coming here has increased significantly, but this has raised a big question mark over the ancient environment and indigenous culture here (Pathak, 2012).

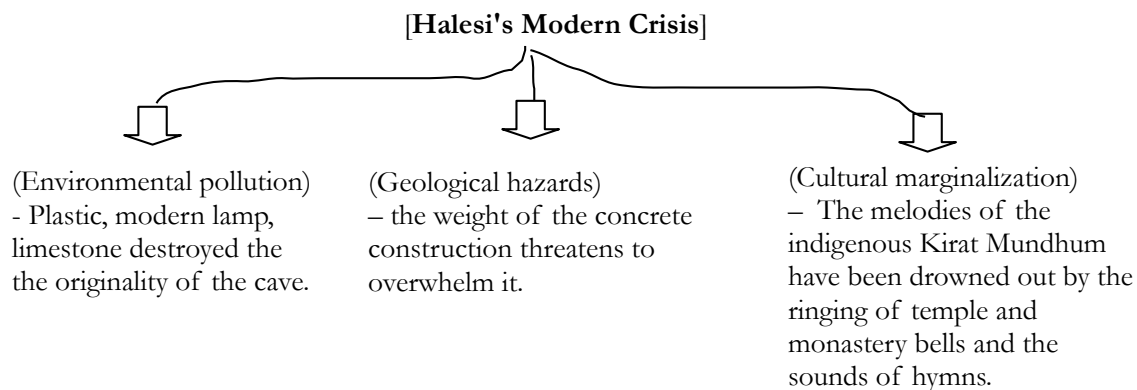
1. Pollution and Garbage: Every day many pilgrims come inside the cave for their darshan. The widespread plastic usage within the cave and immense smoke from incense sticks and casual religious offerings to water are damaging the caves and ecosystem inside. The old mosses and mosses that grow on the damp walls of the cave are starting to dry up due to the smoke and pollution, which is disfiguring the original appearance of the cave.

2. Risk of geological instability: Halesi Cave, which is a limestone. It is made of something which is very soft and sensitive in nature. Modern concrete construction works around and inside the cave in the name of temple development; heavy stairs and mismanagement of drainage have weakened the natural structure of the cave. It has been pointed out that there is a geological risk of the cave roof collapsing any day due to the uncontrolled pressure of many people and the weight on the ground.

3. Cultural Decay and Pressure of Sanskritisation: The most serious and worrying aspect is the fading of the local Kirat Mundhum identity. With the modernisation of the market and the increasing Hinduisation of state institutions, the history of Halesung, the original ancestral root of Halesung, is gradually being erased. The temple's notice boards, official websites and promotional materials increasingly present it as only a 'Hindu Mahadev Temple', which

increases the risk of future generations forgetting the tri-religious and especially tribal history of this place. (Subba, 1999) |

In recent years, the local autonomous government—Halesi Tuwachung Municipality and the 'Halesi Mahadev Sthan Vikas Samiti'—has made some efforts to manage and preserve it, but those efforts are mostly limited to building physical infrastructure. There is still a lack of policy balance between preserving intangible cultural heritage and giving equal space to the interpretations of all three religions.



8. Conclusion: The Eternal Womb and the Spiritual Heartbeat of the East

Halesi is not just a natural cave or limestone cave in a corner of the Khotang district. It is a vast and eternal symbol of the multicultural history, inclusive character and spiritual diversity of the whole of Nepal. It is a living labyrinth whose history begins with the primordial 'Halesung' of the Kirat ancestors and the consciousness of the womb of Mother Earth, ends with becoming a refuge for the Hindu god Shiva in distress, and ends with reaching the laboratory where the great guru of Vajrayana Buddhism, Padmasambhava, attained immortality. Every rock of nature here, every tunnel and every drop of water dripping from the roof has three different names, three different histories and the blessings of all three religions.

Halesi is a powerful and vibrant philosophical tool to correct the old monotonous history of Nepali culture, which is written only through a single Sanskrit or classical lens. It teaches us how different stories, different languages, and different gods can coexist in the same geography. The damp, black, and moss-covered walls of Halesi embody the true indigenous essence and the essence of coexistence of Eastern Nepal. The journey through this land of the sacred of Halesi is not only covering a physical distance; it means discovering the growth of consciousness of humanity, the wideness of nature and the unending stream of harmony of religion which has been continuously flowing from age to age like the billows of Koshi.

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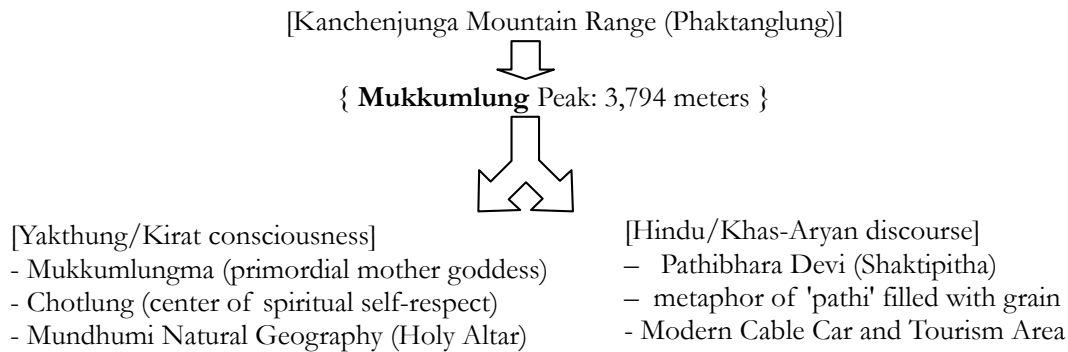
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Chapter 6: Mukkumlung – The Primitive Altar of the Yakthungs: An Anthropological Discussion of Indigenous Identity, Capitalist Capitalism, and Sacred Geography

1. Introduction: The pinnacle of infinite power and multicultural consciousness

A sacred site on the distant eastern frontier of Nepal in the northern highlands of the Taplejung district, the supernatural terrain where the formidable peaks of the earth appear to salute the cerulean skies, there is a summit of an immensely ancient yet potent spirituality. To the outside world, the mainstream of the nation-state, and contemporary Hindu pilgrims, this mountain is the sacred abode of the goddess of prosperity, wish fulfilment, and blessings, 'Pathibhara' (Gaudel, 2020).

However, if we dig into the historical foundation of this land, the Limbu (Yakthung) community, the original inhabitants of this land, have been calling this mountain 'Mukkumlung' for thousands of years. Compared to other tourist or religious mountains in Nepal, this peak is not just a beautiful natural destination. It is the indigenous spiritual pole star of the entire Eastern Himalayan region, which has preserved the primitive codes of the Kirat civilisation in its womb (Subba, 1999).



At a startling 3,794 metres above sea level, the Mukkumlung, as we know it, is a perfect combination of spirit and nature, with vast horizons surrounding its peak. One is also in the unique position of seeing the silvery-white garment of the Phaktanglung (Kanchenjunga), the 3rd highest mountain on Earth, stretching into the sky all around it. This is a point where the cold mist flowing from the mountains becomes a prayer in itself and the profound silence there enlivens the dialogue with the ancestors (Limbu, 2018).

In this chapter, we are not just writing about a religious temple. We are doing an anthropological analysis of the primitive concept of this mountain in the minds of the indigenous Yakthung community, its Sanskritisation over time, and the serious crisis that the entry of

corporate capitalism (the Kevalkar dispute) has created for the indigenous identity in the present day.

2. Indigenous Identity: The Philosophy of 'Chotlung' in Mukkumlung and Yakthung Cultures

Although this sacred mountain is known by the name 'Pathibhara' by most people today, its only original identity in ancient times was 'Mukkumlung'. The creation of this word in the Limbu (Yakthung) language and philosophy was not an accidental event, but rather a serious philosophical and spiritual meaning is hidden behind it (Chemjong, 2003). From the perspective of linguistics and anthropology, its name appears to be a combination of two original indigenous roots:

Mukkum: In the Yakthung language and Mundhum philosophy, 'Mukkum' means 'strength', 'supreme power', 'invincible spiritual energy' or 'natural prowess'. It refers to that basic state of any living being or plant, which cannot be overcome by any external force.

Lung: In Kirat Mundhum, 'Lung' means stone or rock. Stone is not an inanimate object for Kirats; it is a witness to the ancient history and stability of the earth.

Therefore, the literal meaning of Mukkumlung is "stone of power" or "rock of great energy" (Subba, 1999). According to the Kirat oral epic 'Mundhum', this mountain is a living deity in itself. This cave or peak is the ancestral home of the primordial mother goddess 'Mukkumlungma'. According to the scholars of Mundhum, Mukkumlungma is much older than any of the classical goddesses described in any Vedic or Puranic texts. She is a powerful and independent form of the supreme creator and destroyer of the Yakthungs, Mother 'Yuma Sammang' (Chemjong, 2003).

Yakthung identity and Mukkumlung philosophy
• Mukkum (power/divine energy) + Lung (rock) = Primordial Stone of Power
• Chotlung: The highest peak of collective self-respect and spiritual dignity
• Kipat: The unbroken, ancestral spiritual connection between the land and the world
• Mukkumlungma: The natural and inhuman forms of Yuma Sammang

For the Yakthung community, Mukkumlung is not just a simple altar for animal sacrifices or seeking blessings for personal gain. It is their historical 'Kipat'. That is, it is the highest pillar of ancestral, collective, and spiritual rights over land (Caplan, 1970). For the indigenous people of Taplejung and its surroundings, this peak is a guardian of their history.

There is a word in Yakthung philosophy—'Chotlung', which means the highest peak of spiritual and mental dignity of an individual or an entire community (Limbu, 2018). If a Yakthung's chotlung collapses, his self-respect, courage, and existence are destroyed. Mukkumlung is the collective Chotlung of the entire Yakthung nation. To feel these mountains, stones and forests is to enter into a spiritual and physical communion with the ancestors of the primeval past and with one's consciousness in the material world; as a result, to violate this mountain in any form is an assault on the sanctity and honour of our predecessors.

3. Mythological Roots: The Shepherd's Vision and the Essence of Folklore

To understand how Mukkumlung developed over time as a common pilgrimage site, study local oral traditions here. These stories have served as an invisible bridge between the primitive nature-worshipping era and modern organised religion. The most famous folktale prevalent here is connected with a native Limbu sheep herder, who used to come to the foothills and summits of this mountain with his hundreds of sheep to graze (Sagant, 1996).

According to the story, one day, a thick, mysterious fog suddenly covered the peak of Mukkumlung. Within that fog, hundreds of the shepherd's sheep suddenly disappeared. Those sheep were the shepherd's only support and wealth in life. After losing his sheep, the shepherd cried a lot and was upset, and in that strange solitude of the mountain, he realised that this was no ordinary event, but rather the invisible spirits of the mountain or Mother Nature were angry with him.

He immediately took the forest stones as his witness, vowed to worship on his behalf to calm nature, and to always maintain the dignity of this land. Then, exhausted, he fell asleep under an old tree.

Oral Mundhum narrative:

"In the shepherd's dream, the primordial goddess of the mountains appeared to Mukkumlung. She spoke not in any grammatical language of men but in the gentle breeze and the forest's own natural charm. She said, 'I am the soul of this mountain. If you keep my dwelling place sacred and respect me, I will protect your lineage and livestock.'"

When the shepherd woke up, he offered prayers at the altar of mountain ginger, grain, and stone, as per the goddess's divine wish. Immediately, the thick fog magically lifted, and all the lost sheep filed back to the fold through the rocky crevices of the mountain (Sagant, 1996).

4. Pathibhara: The Pot of the Field and the Historical Process of Sanskritisation

When the Gorkhali state was unified in the latter half of the 18th century and the administrative and religious influence of the Khas-Aryan culture began to grow in the eastern Limbuwan region, new linguistic and religious layers were gradually added to the indigenous identity of the Mukkumlung. (Caplan, 1970). In this process, the mountain was named 'Pathibhara'. This name is not derived from the Yakthung language but from a specific metaphor for agricultural life in the Khas-Nepali language. (Metaphor) Born from.

In traditional Nepali society, a 'pathi' is a special wooden or copper vessel used to measure or store grain. And 'bhara' literally means a state of being filled with grain. Since the top of the hill looks exactly like a pathi filled with grain when viewed from a distance, this hill became a symbol of prosperity for the Khas-Aryan farmers who descended the hill to cultivate the Terai and mid-hills (Resist, 2011).

For them, it was a mountain where the goddess always kept the people's grain reserves and health full like a pot. Thus, a native 'stone of power' (mukkumlung) was transformed into an

agricultural society's 'vessel of prosperity' (pathibhara).

Naming and ideological transformation of Mukkumlung	
Yakthung Mundhumi period	Khas-Aryan Sanskritization period
• Mukkumlung (Stone of Power)	• Pathibhara (Pot filled with grain)
• Yuma Sammanko Natural Form	• Durga or Kali (Classical Hindu Goddess)
• Spiritual symbols of Kipat and Chotlung	• National Shaktipeeth and tourist site

In the last century, especially under the policy of national unification during the Rana and Panchayat periods, this goddess began to be recognised and worshipped as Bhagwati Durga or the bloodthirsty Kali, integrating her into the Tantric and Shakta traditions of Hinduism. The 'Sanskritisation' propounded by anthropologist M.N. Srinivas. This is a classic example of where local non-Hindu deities are assimilated into the mainstream by giving them a highly Hindu Valmiki or mythological form (Bista, 1991).

There was permanent development work, large copper tridents, and a noticeable growth in the Brahmin clergy community in the temple. Still, despite the general wave of Hinduisation that spread through Mukkumlung, there is still something exceptional. There is not a single large manmade human-shaped idol made of metal or stone to be found at the Pathibhara temple, which sets it apart from temples in the Kathmandu Valley like Dakshinkali and Guhyeshwori.

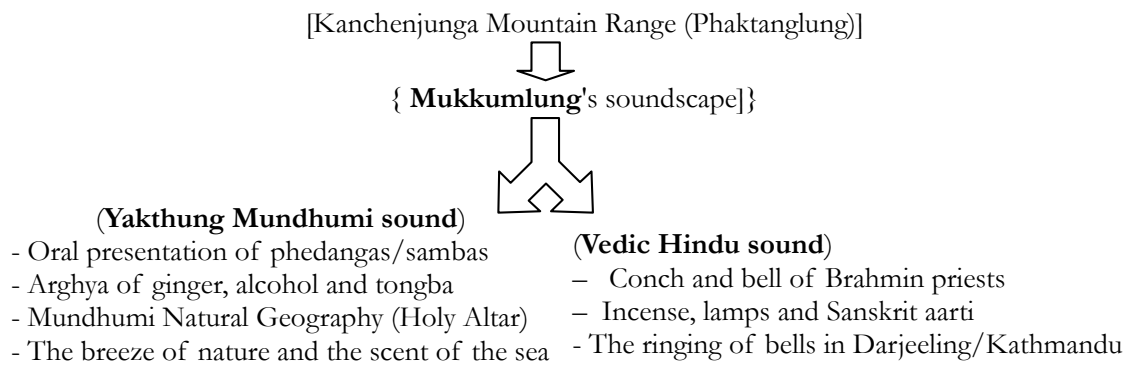
The goddess still exists there today in the form of primitive natural rocks and mountains under an open sky (Resist, 2011). This shows that, no matter how much Sanskritisation, even classical religion was unable to completely eradicate that primitive, indigenous form of nature.

5. Ritual Scenario: Coexistence of Mundhum Phedangma and Vedic Mantras

The daily religious and ritual life of Mukkumlung is a wonderful example of multicultural coexistence and harmony. It is one of those rare sacred places in the world where the primitive cries of tribal animal sacrifices on one side and the meditation and tantric worship of Hindus on the other seem to resonate together (Limbu, 2018).

If you stand in that high and cold temple complex in Mukkumlung, at any given time you will find the indigenous priests of the Yakthung community, 'Phedangma', 'Samba' or 'Yeba', performing puja in their traditional Mundhum attire (Sagant, 1996). Their way of worship is completely different from established Hindu rituals.

They do not recite any Sanskrit verses or chants to communicate with the goddess Mukkumlungma. Instead, they use raw ginger grown on the hillsides, the sacred indigenous millet liquor (thingnam) kept in bamboo pots, and the rhythmic oral chants of Mundhum. Their ritual calendar is not based on any classical calendar or lunar date. Their worship practice relies on the Himalayan winds and the changing seasons. It also consists of visions from their ancestors in dreams (Limbu, 2018).



At the exact same time and on the other side of the same rock, Brahmin priests, whether state-appointed or ordinary Hindu devotees, light lamps, camphor, and incense and blow conch shells to perform the Vedic aarti of the goddess. Thousands of Hindu pilgrims, who have made the arduous journey from Kathmandu, Pokhara, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Siliguri, are offering small and large brass bells to the temple pillars in joy that their wishes have been fulfilled (Gaudel, 2020).

Therefore, the true identity of Mukkumlung is the melodious sound of the Himalayan breeze and the melodious sound of thousands of bells. It is a unique blend of Mundhum Samlo and Vedic mantras, which is called the 'collective sound of the Eastern Himalayas'. It can be said that this sound is not dividing people, but rather uniting them in a single sphere of faith.

6. Signs of Resistance: The Cable car Controversy and the Struggle Against Neo-Liberal Capitalism

In recent years, Mukkumlung has become more than just a place of quiet and secluded religious meditation. It has become a place of indigenous identity, land rights, and indigenous resistance in eastern Nepal. It has become the biggest political symbol of the 20th century. The core of this controversy is divided into two main dimensions—one is the ideological battle and the other is the opposition to the physical construction (the Kevalkar Project) promoted by corporate capitalism.

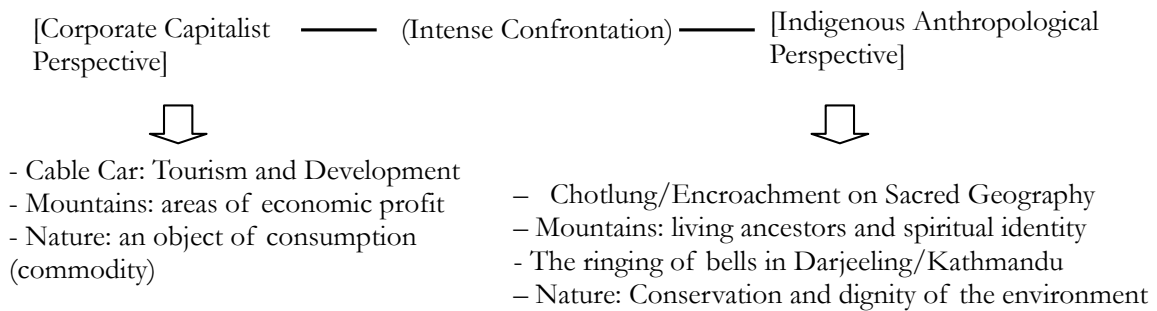
Restoration of names and the politics of memory

The last few decades have witnessed a concerted push by Yakthung activists, anthropologists, and civil organisations (like Kirat Yakthung Chumlung) for the recognition of the "native name" of the mountain – "Mukkumlung" (Subba, 2023). This demand certainly does not mean completely abandoning the established name 'Pathibhara' or offending the faith of Hindus.

This is to do justice to a historical and indigenous identity that has been obscured for years by the state's single-ethnic-linguistic policy. For the Yakthungs, this name is not just a word; it is their "mark of memory". who constantly reminds them that they are the true and primal guardians of this earth (Subba, 1999).

Kewalkar controversy: A capitalist attack on Chotlung

The biggest and most sensitive controversy currently raging in Taplejung regarding Mukkumlung is the commercial cable car project and luxury resorts being built there by Nepal's big business houses and corporate capitalists. They are working in the name of local development and religious tourism. Opposing the local Yakthung community, activists, the Mundhum and the Mukkumlung Conservation Joint Struggle Committee have been actively opposing and resisting this project (Subba, 2023).



We must comprehend the conceptual gap between the narrative of development by capitalism in the modern era and the anthropological narrative by indigenous people for discerning this conflict in its kernel. To the capitalist, that scared mountain is but 'an field of monetary earnings (as an article)'. And it is 'a tool of minting cash by the arrival of vacationers'.

But to the native Yakthungs, it's 'a collective dwelling ancestor and Chotlung.'

To the Mundhum beliefs, erecting tall concrete towers of contemporary concrete construction in high and sacred peaks such as Mukkumlung, damaging the Kanchenjunga biodiversity by dozers, introducing liquors, commercial loud noises in constructing resort buildings and so forth are as if kicking on the chest of their ancestors (goddesses) (Subba, 2023). Indigenous activists claim that the development of a cable automobile project will spoil the peaceful sanctity, energy and environmental harmony of the mountain permanently; it'll convert 'the mountain right into a fashionable tourist theme park full of clamour rather than the sacred mountain'. This resistance will not be solely on opposition to a cable automobile task; rather, it's an 'ancestral battle for the state's capital and development not to ever displace indigenous spiritual heritage, native lands and earthly identification, spiritual dignity and humanity.'

7. Environmental Landmark:

The Capital of Rododendron and Mundhum Biodiversity From a non-secular perspective, Mukkumlung is also a spiritual as well as natural practice that acts as an environmental and biological marvel from the total Himalayas.

A journey beginning from Phungling Bazaar to Mukkumlung is really a big 'vertical garden' of Mother Nature itself. The changes in climate, flora and fauna on your climb up the

mountain may surprise you with their variety and splendour. This mountain zone as well as surrounding area forests such as Sukepokhari, Deurali, and Bhalugaunde are also named as the 'Red Gourd Toad Capital of the World'.

It also includes the 'Rhododendron Capital of the World'. More than 30 species of hyacinth plant varieties – like Sunpati, Rato Hyacinth, Seto Hyacinth, and Chimal – found in Nepal grow and bloom concurrently in the base of Mukkumlung. At the end of spring, the complete mountain becomes adorned like a vast carpet in white, pink and red.

Environmental and cultural value of Mukkumlung
• Biological uniqueness: Habitat of more than 30 species of red-footed ferrets found in Nepal
• Mundhumi metaphor: The flower of the Gurans is not just a decoration; it is literally the 'blood of the earth'.
• Medicinal knowledge: Indigenous conservation systems of local plants and herbs

In Yakthung culture and Mundhum, these flowers are not just objects of beauty or decoration. In Mundhum philosophy, these flowers are considered to be the "blood of the earth" and a reflection of the spirits of ancestors (Limbu, 2018). The use of Gurans and Sunpati leaves is mandatory in every one of their rituals.

Indigenous knowledge of the medicinal uses of these plants is also stored with the local people. Therefore, when these thousands of years old Gurans forests are cut down for the construction of cable cars, not only are the trees cut down, but an entire natural library and biological history preserved by Yakthung Mundhum are destroyed forever. This destruction of the environment is sure to ultimately have a devastating impact on the climate and water resources of the region.

8. Socio-economic impact: The heart of Taplejung and the 'black gold' of cardamom

Mukkumlung is the real backbone of the economic and social life of the Taplejung district and the entire eastern Nepal. This mountain has not only provided spiritual shade to the residents but has also laid a strong foundation for their daily livelihood and economy.

Its economic impact can be divided into two main sections (Gaudel, 2020):

8.1 Pilgrimage economy

Tens of thousands of pilgrims from home and abroad, including India, Nepal and Bhutan, descend on Taplejung every year to pay homage to Mukkumlung (Pathibhara). Various small and large hotels, eateries, lodges and puja samagri shops are scattered along the isolated road stretching from Phungling Bazaar up to Sukepokhari, Upper Phedi and Kaflepati. These shops include small home businesses started by local Sherpa, Limbu and Rai women, who support their families by selling Lekali food, cow ghee, chhurpi and warm clothes to pilgrims. The pilgrimage has created a strong and equitable network of employment at the local level, which the locals fear will be destroyed by the modern cable car company, and all the profits will

go to the pockets of the petty capitalists in the cities.

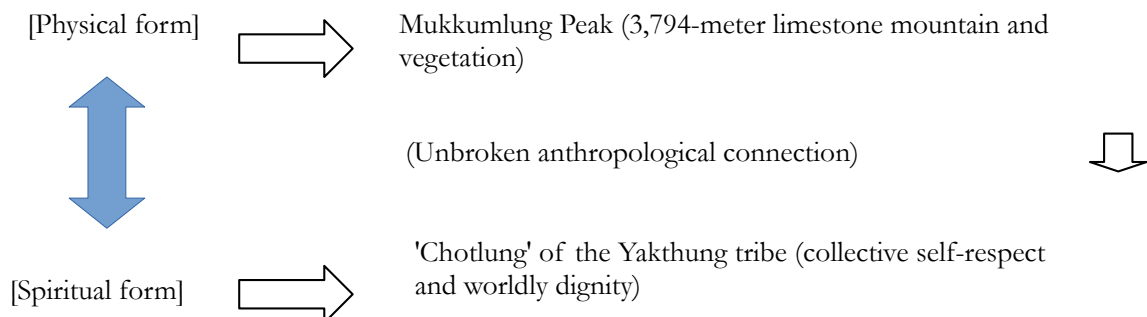
8.2 Relationship between cardamom and 'black gold'

The lower slopes of Mukkumlung Peak and the mountain gorges of Taplejung are home to the world's finest large cardamom. (Black Cardamom) The main producing areas are. Farmers here call cardamom "black gold". (Black Gold) They say this because it is their largest cash crop sold in the international market and their lifeline.

From an anthropological perspective, the local residents also consider this fertility of cardamom to be a blessing from Goddess Mukkumlung and the power of the soil (Subba, 1999). Thus, this mountain, on the one hand, spiritually purifies the human soul, and on the other hand, materially, it has emerged as the main source of economic prosperity for its residents.

9. The Chotlung of the East: A Final Anthropological Reflection

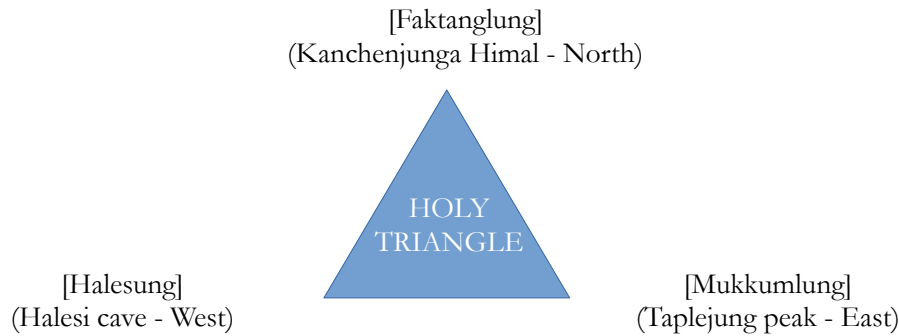
According to the deep philosophical beliefs of the Yakthung culture, every living person has their own 'chotlung' within their inner psyche. This is the highest internal peak of a person's spiritual power, self-respect, and existence, which every person hopes to reach or maintain throughout their life (Limbu, 2018). Mukkumlung in Taplejung is not just a shrine like Halesi in Khotang or Rangeli in Morang; it is the collective and physical manifestation of the indigenous community of the entire Eastern Himalayan region.



When an old Phedangma or Mundhum activist of the Limbu culture looks at this snow-capped white peak from the foot of the mountain, he does not see it as a commercial 'tourist destination'. He never sees himself as a living relative of his, the face of his ancestors, or the history of his land in this mountain. He sees there that "stone of power" (Mukkumlung), which has remained steadfast to this day, even amidst the many political ups and downs of history, the pain of the loss of the Limbuwan kingdom, and cultural oppression, and has been working as a guardian of the East (Subba, 1999). Whether the goddess is named Pathibhara or Mukkumlungma, the essence of this mountain will always be connected to the native soil and the consciousness of the people here.

10. Detailed Analysis: Tribal Facts, Mundhum Evidence and the Sacred Triangle

In the final section of this research-based article, we present some irrefutable historical and archaeological evidence. (Indigenous Evidences) It is essential to present the following, which academically confirms the indigenous ownership of this mountain and its unique geocultural structure:



A. Historical and linguistic evidence

The words "mukku" and "mukkumlungma" have been used irrefutably in the verses of the ancient Yakthung Mundhum since long before the Gorkhali power of Kathmandu entered the eastern Limbuwan region in the late 17th and 18th centuries (Chemjong, 2003). Anthropological linguistics (Linguistic Anthropology) According to the established rules, naming any geography for the first time (toponym). This was the first historical step to assert their physical and spiritual authority over that place. The Yakthung ancestors had established their exclusive cultural dominance over this geography in the early period of history by naming this mountain 'Mukkumlung'. (Subba, 1999)

B. Mundhum Geography and the Sacred Triangle (The Sacred Triangle)

Kirat Mundhum Cosmology: According to Mukkumlung, there is no single or solitary goddess. She is an integral part and sister of other powerful deities in the sacred Mundhum geography of eastern Nepal (Chemjong, 2003). According to Mundhum:

- Phaktanglung (male deity of Mount Kanchenjunga) in the north
- Halesung (prehistoric deity of Halesi) in the west
- And in the east, Mukkumlung (this primordial mother of Taplejung)

These three great spiritual centres together form a vast 'sacred triangle' in the land of eastern Nepal, which defines the cultural, environmental and spiritual boundaries of the region (Subba, 2023).

If today, in the name of development and capitalism, this peak of Mukkumlung is encroached upon and its original Mundhum identity is destroyed, it will not only change the name of a mountain, but it will also forever destroy the spiritual balance and geo-cultural map of

the sacred triangle that the Kirat world has been observing for centuries. This is the most serious and eye-opening anthropological reality of this movement and resistance.

11. Conclusion: Living Heritage and the Path to the Future

This glorious peak of the Far East, Mukkumlung, is known as 'Pathibhara' on today's modern administrative map and attracts millions of Hindu pilgrims every year. However, its tribal connections and history are not just a buried history of the past; they are equally a living and active reality in the present. The special way the locals walk the mountain, the intimate conversations they have with the old trees of the forest, and the high respect and reverence they have for the divine silence of the peak make this a living heritage.

Just as the first rays of the sun each morning hit the snow of Kanchenjunga and shine on the peak of Mukkumlung, so too does this mountain remind us of an eternal and primordial truth. That truth is that the earth itself is sacred, the memory of the ancestors is always alive in its soil, and these mountains of nature are not just profit-making commercial areas; they are primordial altars of human consciousness and power.

Rather than erecting concrete pillars of Kevalkar in the name of development, violating the spiritual and environmental dignity of Mukkumlung, it is better to preserve its tri-religious coexistence and intangible tribal heritage, creating a vibrant cultural ecosystem for future generations. Protecting it as such would be the most visionary and just step for today's state, capital, and society.

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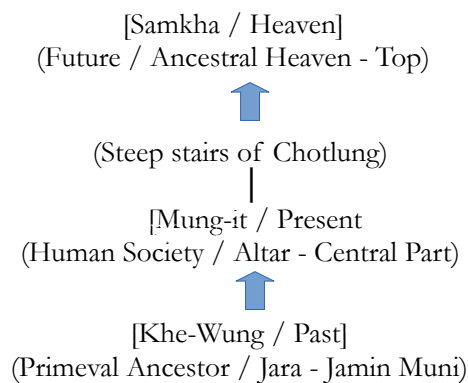
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Chapter 7: Chotlung – Vertical Lineage and the Peak of Kirat Existence: An Anthropological Excavation of Mundhum Sources, Philosophy, and Indigenous Psychology

1. Introduction: The Architecture of the Soul and the Philosophy of Vertical Spirituality

In the eastern hilly and mountainous geography of Nepal—the ancient ancestral lands of historic Limbuwan and Khambuwan—the oldest cultural monuments of human civilisation are not grand brick palaces or golden-roofed temples. They have a natural and solid stone formation built over hundreds of years which has experienced sun, rain, and wind, known as ‘Chotlungs’ in Kirat Yakthung philosophy (Subba, 1999).

A Chotlung is a monumental rock, a heap of rocks. In the Kirat Yakthung Philosophy, a ‘Chotlung’ means the human consciousness at the summit of human experience; it represents the acme of one’s life and the status of self-respect. It is a physical and spiritual symbol that binds the present human life, the past ancestors (sammang), and the future existence into a single entity (Limbu, 2018). To understand the inner essence of Kirat civilisation, it is essential to understand this philosophy of Chotlung. This is actually the oral scripture of the Kirats, ‘Mundhum’. The physical and architectural appearance of Architectural Manifestation



Modern Western Civilization or Urban Planning of the Plains Mostly horizontal believes in expansion. Where physical structures are spread horizontally by occupying land. In contrast, Kirat spirituality is completely vertical (Sagant, 1996). This vision begins from the heavy soil of the earth and rises towards the eternal sky. Chotlung is the strongest symbol of this verticality. This human head (sir) is an intangible cultural heritage that keeps the community high, boosts its morale, and connects the community to its place. When a Kirat looks at his Chotlung, he feels that the history of his lineage stands firm, never to be shaken.

2. Definition of Chotlung: The philosophical boundary between peak and source

The word 'Chotlung' is formed from a combination of the Limbu (Yakthung) language and Mundhum philosophy (Chemjong, 2003). When broken down into linguistic and anthropological terms, this word has a very broad meaning:

- Chot: Its literal meaning is "peak", "highest point", "height of the human head" or "culmination of energy".
- Lung: In Kirat Mundhum, it means "stone" or "rock", a symbol of stability and ancestral witness.

Therefore, the overall meaning of Chotlung is "peak stone" or "tall pillar of life" (Subba, 1999). In Mundhum philosophy, Chotlung is considered a sacred staircase. It is believed that the human soul travels between the physical world and the immaterial world of the ancestors. Each Yakthung clan or Pyang (clan) has its own separate, distinctive Chotlung. This Chotlung is usually established on the highest hill in the village, a strong rocky cliff that is not prone to landslides, or on the top of a mountain, from where one can clearly see one's entire ancestral land and farmland (kipat) (Caplan, 1970).

Difference between 'Chotlung' and 'Chulung'

When studying the indigenous culture and anthropology of eastern Nepal, outside researchers often get confused between the terms 'Chotlung' and 'Chulung'. Although these two words sound similar, their cultural and philosophical meanings are completely different, as can be clearly understood from the table below:

Speciality	चुलुङ (Chulung)	Chotlung
1. Literal meaning	Grave, three-stone stove or oven	The capstone, the high pillar of life
2. Location	The inner corner of a house or the land where the dead soul is buried	The highest hill or peak of the village
3. Primary function	Remembrance of deceased ancestors and family security	Raising the morale of a living human being and identifying lineage
4. Philosophical dimension	It is connected to the past and the underworld (the depths of the earth).	It is related to the present and the future (heaven/sky).

While the Chulung represents the physical rest of a person after death or the safety of life within the home, the Chotlung, as a larger social and spiritual monument, signifies the collective power, self-respect, and highest destination of existence of the individual as well as the entire community (Subba, 1999). Breaking this illusion is the first door to the depths of Kirat philosophy.

3. Living Stone: The Mundhum Method of Selection and the Indigenous Science of Life Enrichment

Chotlung is not an ordinary stone found lying around in the forest or on the banks of a river. The process of erecting this monument and selecting the stone is itself a living indigenous science and spiritual ritual, which can only be performed by the Pedangma, Samba or Yeba, experts in the Mundhum (Sagant, 1996).

When a clan territory (thatthalo) is determined in a new village, the ancestors lay a "living stone" for the Chotlung. Who is looking for the stone? This stone should not be lying on the ground; its roots must be buried deep in the ground. It should usually be located at the head of the village, near a clean spring of water, or on a hill where the first rays of the rising sun can be seen. After finding the stone, the Phedangma "talks to the stone". The ritual begins. He takes the Mundhum ginger and holy water in his hands, recites rhythmic verses, awakens the consciousness of the stone, and asks:

Pedangma's Mundhum Question:

"O eldest son of the earth, Shila! Are you ready to stand firm for ages, carrying the joys and sorrows of this new generation, the burden of their identity, and the history of their ancestors on your chest?"

Only if the stone gives its consent (which is known from the special natural and religious signs that the phedangma receives during the ritual) is the stone cleansed by washing it with the water of the sacred spring. Then there is the 'mung-it'. That is, the work of preserving the native life is completed (Limb, 2018).

This means that the primal spirits and energy waves of the ancestors are formally invited to reside within the stone. From that moment on, the stone is no longer just a cold rock. It becomes a living, respected member of the entire community and the guardian deity of the lineage.

4. Architecture and geo-cultural structure of the Chotlung region

To the outside eye, the Chotlung site may appear very simple, natural and artless. There are neither carved stone statues nor a golden roof. However, its internal geo-cultural structure and architecture are very complex and meaningful. A complete Chotlung site must have three main elements (Karki, 2018):

Geocultural structure of the Chotlung site
• Main Dhunga (Lung): The symbol of the first primitive ancestor, a solid rock
• Altar (Phung-it): Fireless altar with water, ginger, and grain placed on green leaves
• Sacred Garden: Simal and Bamboo Trees (Mother Earth's Hair), Prohibition of Deforestation

A. Main drum (lung)

This is the centrepiece of the Chotlung. It is a large, long, solid rock that symbolises the first primaeval ancestor. It is chosen based on its strength, longevity, and natural connection to the soil. This stone serves as the backbone of the lineage.

B. Altar (Phung-it)

The base of the stone, on which is located a levelled-off area, is the altar, to which worship articles and offerings are presented. Only one difference exists between it and a Vedic or a Hindu altar: fire is not ignited here. Instead of fire, only clean water, raw ginger (the most sacred plant in Kirat philosophy), and fresh grains freshly picked from the fields are kept on green banana or mango leaves in the Mundhum altar (Subba, 2025). This is a completely non-Tantric and nature-friendly altar.

C. Sacred gardens and vegetation

Chotlung is never alone on the mountain. It is surrounded by indigenous sacred trees—mostly Simal (Phalung)—or special types of bamboo are planted. In Mundhum philosophy, these plants are considered the hair of 'Mother Earth'. (Hair of Mother Earth). It is considered Kirat customary law. According to the Chotlung region, cutting down trees or damaging the natural environment there is an unforgivable sin (Karki, 2018). In this way, Chotlung protects the environment through religious faith. It presents a strong indigenous model.

5. Vertical philosophy: the balance of the three worlds

The Chotlung philosophy represents the Kirat worldview. It corresponds to the three levels of the universe, or the world, and this particular verticality provides Kirat monuments with a philosophical contrast with the horizontal organisation of terrestrial settlements like towns or those of the Terai (Sagant, 1996). One can find the cosmological signification of the Chotlung stone if one separates the stone into three parts:

1. Just a little (Che-wong/khe-wung): that portion of the stone embedded in the earth. This is the level of the "past", the underground world. It connects the people of the present generation with the primitive ancestors who have disappeared into the womb of history and the inner consciousness of the soil.

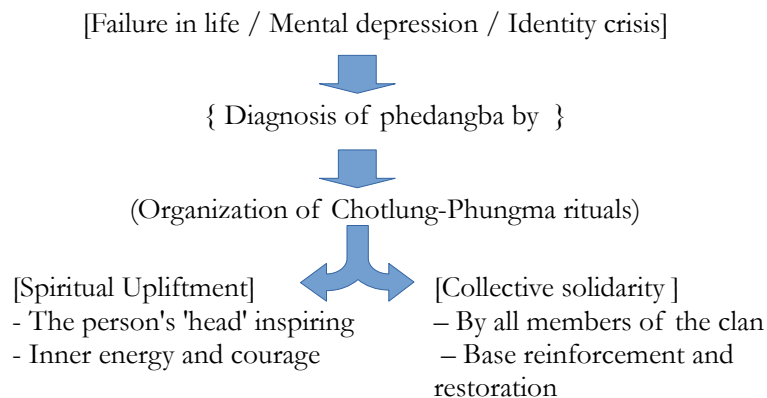
2. Body (Phung-it): The above-ground, clearly visible section where locals pray symbolises the 'present' or the human realm. It's a community and social centre of a village, gathering locals to share happiness and suffering, solve each other's problems, or ask blessings for a new marriage.

3. Tip (Chot): This tip of the stone, which continuously faces toward the sky and the sun, represents the 'future' or the realm of the divine (Samkha).

The Kirats have a deep belief that after a person dies, their soul does not wander around. His soul is in the ancestral heaven (Samkha). To reach this place, one has to climb the steep "stairs" of Chotlung (Limbu, 2018). Therefore, Chotlung is an essential medium not only for present-day humans but also for the great journey of dead souls.

6. Chotlung-Phungma Ritual: Indigenous Psychology and Upliftment of the Soul

The most important and vibrant festival held around this monument in the Mundhum way of life is called 'Chotlung-Phungma'. It is called. In the Yakthung language, its direct and simple meaning is "to raise one's Chotlung, or spiritual peak" (Chemjong, 2003). This ritual is not just a religious ritual; it is a 'psychological treatment' envisioned by modern medical science. It is a very effective indigenous method.



Whenever any member of a clan group within the ethnic group feels a constant frustration on not being successful, always on the verge of dying, feeling physically ill and mentally poor/depressed, and being disconnected from their homeland/ethnic group, the scholars of the Mundhum said that "he/his Chotlung has shattered" or "his head is broken" (Subba, 2025). In such cases the Phedangma carry out a ritual, namely "Chotlung-Phungma", to rekindle the mental strength/energy of the depressed soul.

In this ritual, the soul of the person is invoked with the powerful verses of Mundhum and is inspired to become strong like the peak of a mountain. Here, the Chotlung is not considered a static or lifeless stone; it is a living entity directly linked to the health of the person. It is a Kirat belief that as the health of the mountain is, so is the mental health of the person (Sagant, 1996).

Another beautiful aspect of this puja is the collective solidarity. If the Chotlung stone is slightly damaged or broken due to natural disasters or the passage of time, restoration (Chutye) is needed. During the puja, all the members of the entire clan necessarily gather on the hill. They collectively contribute their labour, add new strong stones to the base of the Chotlung and make it upright again (Chemjong, 2003).

This collective act proves that preserving one's history and identity is not just the responsibility of one individual but of the entire tribe. The practice now is an indomitable ritualistic defence. The evidence shows that no amount of political or economical upheaval or social dislocation will alter and bury the deep roots for which the native spirit is able to survive and continue on.

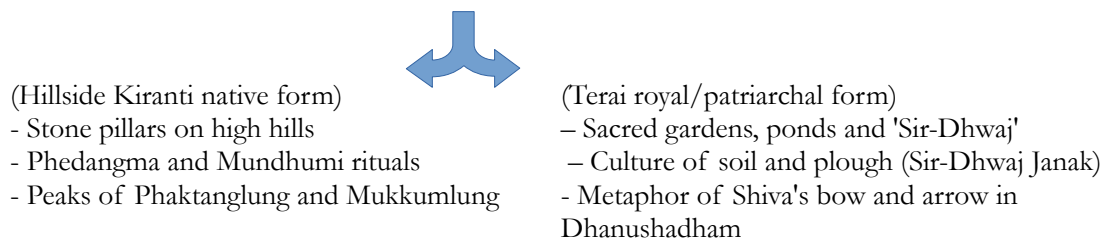
7. Kirat Raja and Chotlung: From the court of Janak Sirdhwaj to the metaphor of Dhanushadham

The Kirat rulers and ancient kings had a very deep and sacred political-religious connection with these stone monuments. When we look at the historical and mundum layers together, the lineage of the ancient mythical king Siradhwaia (Janak) and the Chotlung philosophy seem to be very close (Subba, 1999).

According to ancient texts and folk history, King Siradhwaia was a ruler who, even while living in his luxurious palace, never forgot the dignity of "plough" and "soil". The philosophical meaning of the word 'Sir-Dhwaj' (carrying a flag on the head) attached to his name is a kind of "royal chotlung" established in the land of the Terai (Subba, 1999).

While the Kirats of the hills were establishing their identity by erecting stone pillars on high hills, at the same time, the Janaka kings in the Mithila lands of the Terai were institutionalising the third and more advanced form of Chotlung philosophy by building sacred gardens (such as flower gardens) and vast ponds. For them, land was the supreme power.

[Historical expansion of Chotlung philosophy]



In this backdrop the folktale of Lord Shiva's pinak falling down into the Dhanushadham of the Terai could be interpreted from the viewpoint of Chotlung philosophy (Subba, 1999). Anthropologically, the fallen pinak could simply imply the fallen Chotlung of the Earth, which had caused a decline of morale and stability on Earth in those periods.

When Rama attempted to lift that heavy bow from the ground during Sita Swayamvara, it was not just a display of heroism. It was a great religious gesture of restoring the spiritual connection between earth and sky, the 'Chotlung-Phungma'. What this historical event proves is that this vision of Chotlung was not limited to a small gorge in the mountains; it governed the political and spiritual consciousness of the vast ancient Kirat civilisation, stretching from the white snow of the Himalayas to the fertile soil of the Terai (Subba, 1999).

8. Historical Chotlung sites of Eastern Nepal: Geocultural map

If we look at the geographical structure of eastern Nepal from a global perspective, some of the huge peaks of nature there are considered to be the Maha-Chotlung of the entire Kirat nation (Great Chotlungs). It seems to have been accepted for ages as such. Such places are not just tourist sites but are mighty bastions of Kirat existence (Upreti, 2011):

1. Phaktanglung (Kanchenjunga Himal): This is perceived by the Limbu (Yakthung) people as the world's greatest and ultimate Chotlung (Chemjong, 2003). As per the Mundhum, this mountain is the origin of human life, the ultimate ancestor house where human souls are cremated and find rest.

The great white mountain peak symbolizes Kirat pride.

2. Halesung (Halesi Mahagufa): In terms of the Rai community, Halesi Cave is a mysterious netherworld which serves as a worldly treasure in which the ancestors had received the knowledge and energy of earth from deep contemplation. The cave has a clear link with the netherworld, caves underground, and the core of the earth.

3. Mukkumlung (Pathibhara Peak): This Taplejung's mountain is a concrete strength which had been lifting the morale of the entire community (Subba, 2023).

4. Antu Mountain and Sandakpur Peaks: In Ilam, both of the Srianthu and Sandakpur Peaks are also regarded as Chotlung. According to Kirat folk belief, when the first rays of the morning sun hit these peaks, a new awakening begins in the souls of the people of the entire eastern geography.

9. Contemporary Challenges: Capitalist Urbanization, View-Tower Terror, and the Digital Renaissance

The rapid modernisation of the 21st century, neoliberal capitalism, and indiscriminate material development have emerged as the greatest and deadliest threat to the existence of Chotlung in history. To the modern engineering and commercial mindset, those sacred mountains are merely "view towers". They are just empty lands to build on, build resorts, or make a profit by digging roads (Gaudel, 2020).

In the name of road expansion or the construction of ugly concrete structures like view towers, many ancient Chotlung stones in eastern Nepal are being bulldozed, thrown away and destroyed. To the contractors and developers, they are just ordinary stones, but to the Kirat community, they are the living heads of their ancestors and pages of history (Subba, 1999). This cultural erasure has put the identity of indigenous peoples in jeopardy.

[The Chotlung Crisis of the 21st Century]



(Physical/Corporate Threat)

- The Terror of Dozer and View-Tower
- Towards the destruction of ancient sacred stones
- Consumption of nature for commercial profit

(Digital/Psychological Renaissance)

- Dr Nawa Raj Subba's Psychological Study
- 'Digital anchor' of youth abroad
- "Digital Chotlung Map" through GPS technology

The Indigenous Foundation of Mental Health and the Digital Renaissance

During this crisis too, there has emerged a possibility of a different approach for human existence through this concept of Chotlung. There is renewed research on the Chotlung by Dr. Nawa Raj Subba (2023, 2025) in anthropology and psychology, and it interprets the Chotlung as a significant mental hook. In this age of globalisation, when many Kirat young people are residing in places like Hong Kong, UK, the USA, and Gulf countries as expatriates, it can serve the identity problem and mental isolation faced by many Kirat youth away from their homelands.

As stated by Dr. Subba, "In such a context the inherited Chotlung identity created by our forefathers serves as a great psychic bulwark. On thinking back to the ancestral Chotlung Hills while living far away, even as the globe is circling, he receives the sense of mental robustness, inner steadiness and oneness of identification that shields him away from mental confusion and mental health issues" (Subba, 2025).

This Renaissance itself is a clear example where modern, educated and globally conscious Kirat young men have been utilising modern technology for the preservation of their indigenous heritage.

They are capturing stories from their oral historians and using GPS (Global Positioning System). They have been charting out thousands of historical Chotlung places of the eastern part of Nepal with the aid of technology (Subba, 2023). They created a "digital Chotlung map", or they are building it so that if tomorrow a contractor tries to demolish those stones in the name of development, they can be legally and historically challenged. This is a historic and courageous attempt at 'intangible cultural freedom' initiated by Indigenous youth against modern capitalism and cultural erasure.

10. Conclusion: Intact Witness and the Path to the Future

Chotlung is the last intact and invincible cultural landmark of the hill and mountain civilisation of eastern Nepal. This vision makes us realise a serious human truth – man can demolish concrete buildings, change the facades of temples or correct the pages of history if he wants, but he can never destroy the intangible spirit and consciousness of his ancestors, which have been enshrined in the native soil and living stone for thousands of years, by the power of capital and power (Subba, 1999).

Chotlung is a strong and impartial witness to history, whose ideological range extends from the Plough Revolution and court of ancient King Sirdhwaj Janak to the remote and lofty Mukkumlung hills of Taplejung. It constantly reminds us modern humans that we are all fundamentally 'Sir-Dhwaj' (carrying the flag of self-respect on our heads and loving the soil) people who are physically connected to the soil and plough of the earth but spiritually always at the highest peak of consciousness. (Chot) We have looked up to the sky in search.

To understand this vision of Chotlung from a deeper perspective is to firmly grasp that those majestic mountains of eastern Nepal are not just superficial tourist photo opportunities, but rather the living foundations of our families, our living ancestors, our present mental health, and our secure future. The more upright and strong the stones of Chotlung are, the stronger the foundation of multicultural harmony and indigenous identity of Nepali society will become in the future.

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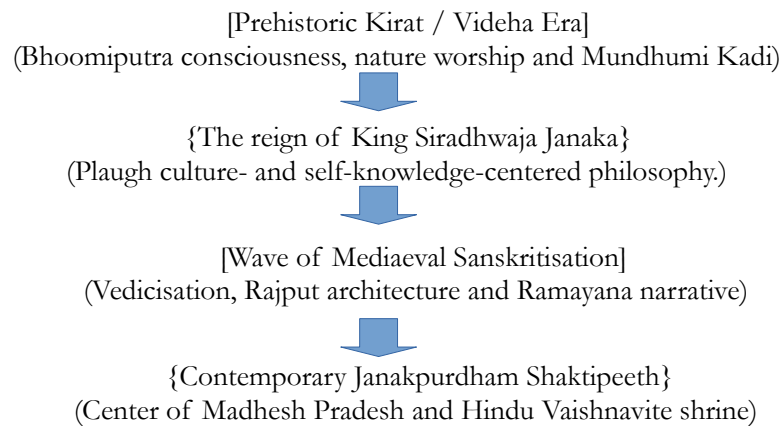
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Chapter 8: Janakpur – The Kirat Heritage of King Siradhwaj: Anthropological Excavations on the Geo-Cultural Reality and Sanskritisation of the Videha Civilization

1. Introduction: The indigenous Videha emperor who drew the line of the plow

At present, Janakpurdham is established as the provincial capital of Madhesh Pradesh and a famous mythological, historical and religious centre in South Asia. For modern consciousness, mainstream media and national and international Hindu pilgrims, this city is the holy meeting place of Maryada Purushottam Shri Ram and Jagajjanani Sita. The magnificent Janaki Temple, numerous ponds and the name "Sita-Ram" echoing in every street seem to portray this land as a centre of Shakta and Vaishnava sects (Jha, 1971).

However, no strong period of history is built in a single day or from a single commentary. If we examine the pre-historical foundation hidden within this shiny classical cover of Janakpurdham, it is clear that the roots of this civilisation are irrefutably linked to the primitive indigenous Kirat civilisation and Mundhum worldview that developed in the foothills of the hills and Terai of eastern Nepal (Chemjong, 2003).



History texts, folklore, and anthropological sources unanimously suggest that these early emperors who reigned over the Mithila region did not just pop up out of the blue. Let it be clear that the 'Janak' cited in the ancient texts is not merely the name of an individual. Rather, Janak was a glorious dynasty or title which passed through the hands of several Videha rulers. Siradhwaja Janaka, commonly known as 'King Janaka' to the laymen, stands out among numerous Janak emperors for his fame and philosophical thoughts.

This primitive lineage of Janakas was directly related to the original Kirat community, the land-owning people who had inhabited the eastern Terai, inner Madhes, and mountain gorges of Nepal for thousands of years. The reason this history has been lost to the present day is that

the centre of statehood and written history have always used only the lens of Sanskrit (Subba, 1999). Therefore, exploring the reality of this past of Janakpurdham, uncovering its Kirat roots, and explaining in detail how it was gradually Hinduised or Vedicised has become both a significant need and a challenge for today's academic world.

2. Anthropological meaning of the flag: a symbol of soil, plow, and native labor

The fact that King Janaka's real name was Siradhwaja is a major clue from a linguistic and anthropological perspective. According to established Sanskrit grammar, this name is divided into two parts:

- Head (Sir): Its literal meaning is 'plough' or 'the line formed by digging the ground with a plough' (furrow).
- Flag(Dhvaja): It means 'flag', 'ensign' or 'supreme symbol'.

Therefore, the literal meaning of Siradhwaj is "a ruler who makes the halo his flag or symbol of power" (Pathak, 2012). Established Vedic and mythological stories present this as a miracle. According to which, King Janaka was himself ploughing with a golden plough to sanctify the land before performing any major religious sacrifice or ritual, and at that moment, a divine child emerged from the ploughshare (from under the ground), who was named 'Sita' (which means 'plough line').

However, if we look at the inner meaning of this story through the lens of Indigenous anthropology, it seems to carry a completely different and vibrant history. In the prehistoric period, the Kirat people living in the Terai and foothills of eastern Nepal were originally a savage and hunter-gatherer people, just entering the era of agriculture, where they cultivated the land and cultivated crops (Subba, 1999).

Anthropological adaptation of 'Seeradhvaj'
• Classical Vedic Commentary: Origin of Sita plowing gold for sacrifice
• Indigenous Commentary: The History of the Transition from the Hunter-Gatherer Age to the Systematic Agriculture Age
• Seer (plough) + Dhoj (flag) = Philosophy that considers labor and soil as the foundation of empire
• Sita: Not a divine miracle; a symbol of earth, soil, and indigenous labor

In ancient civilisations, the one who first cleared the forest and cultivated the soil was considered the true owner or son of the land (Caplan, 1970). King Siradhwaj's ploughing himself was not just a small religious drama; it was evidence that he was a tribal ruler whose power lay not in foreign armies or horses but in the soil and labour of his own land. He was more focused on cultivating his own fields and lands than on expanding his war effort.

According to historians, this myth is actually a verbal summary of the historical development in which the Kirats, who lived in the hilly regions, gradually descended to the plains and marshy areas of the Terai (Madhes) and established a well-organised agricultural state (Subba,

1999). Therefore, Sita is not a character born from a mantra; she is a true daughter of the earth, born from the womb of this native soil and labour.

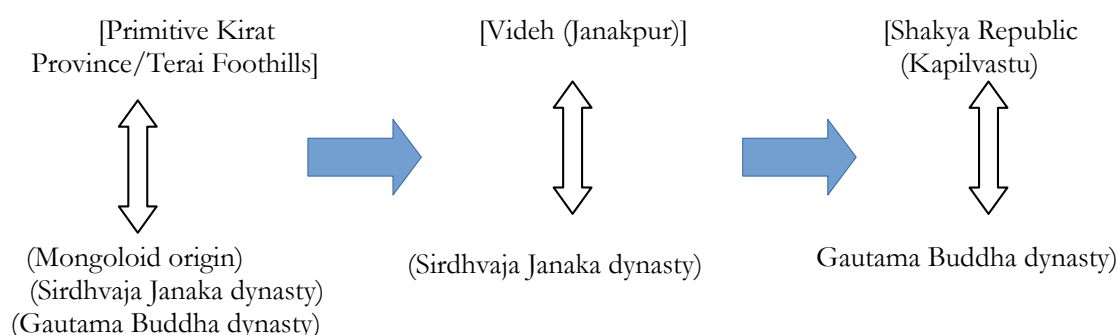
3. Kirat identity of the Janak dynasty: historical facts and linguistic evidence

It has been repeatedly stated by eminent scholars of South Asian history and linguistics that the ancient Videhas and Janaka kings of the Mithila region were originally a branch of the Mongoloid or Kirat race. We have strong historical and anthropological evidence to support this claim (Chatterji, 1951; Chemjong, 2003).

a. Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterjee's Viewpoint

Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, a prominent scholar of linguistics and history of the Indian subcontinent, has written her memoir 'Kirat-Jana-Kriti', which has deeply excavated the ancient connections between eastern Nepal and the Gangetic Plain (Chatterji, 1951).

According to him, the Kirans of Mongoloid origin were already firmly established in the Himalayan foothills and the swampy forests of the Terai long before the Vedic Aryans spread into South Asia. Chatterjee clearly writes that the Videhas of ancient Janakpur and later the Sakya dynasty that gave birth to the Buddha in Kapilvastu were not originally Aryans; they were the indigenous descendants of the same Kirans who roamed the hills and the Terai, who gradually built their own independent republics and civilisations in the northern part of the Gangetic plain (Chatterji, 2003).



B. Mundhum Evidence and the Discovery of Iman Singh Chemjong

The original source of the oral history and traditions of the Kirat people, the Mundhum, contains long narratives of powerful and wise kings who ruled the plains of the Terai and the Madhes. Nepal's renowned historian Iman Singh Chemjong (2003) claimed in his research that the Janaka dynasty is actually the 'hang' of the ancient Kirat kings. There was a southern branch of the Hang dynasty.

According to Mundhum folklore, there was a relationship of bread and daughter-in-law and regular trade between the Kirat kings of the hills and the Videha rulers of the Terai. Indigenous techniques for surviving and utilising the soil in this swampy and malaria-ridden jungle environment of the Terai. Only those Kirans, the sons of the land, knew before anyone

else (Chemjong, 2003).

C. The presence of Kirats in ancient texts

If we study the ancient Hindu epic 'Mahabharata' and various Puranas in detail, there too we find mention of the great strategic power of the "Kirats" who lived in the marshy areas east of the Himalayas and in the Terai (Thapar, 1984). There are stories of Arjuna and Bhima fighting the Kirat kings of the eastern Tarai during the Vana Parva and Digvijay Parva of the Mahabharata and respecting their high philosophical consciousness.

However, over time, as the political and religious dominance of the Central Aryans increased in the Terai, they were forcibly "Vedicised" or "Aryanised" to overshadow the glorious history of these indigenous Kirat rulers (Sharma, 2004). Their genealogy was linked to the fictional Puranas of Sanskrit and given the name of the 'Nimi' or 'Ikshvaku' dynasty so that the political and religious interests of the established centre could be fulfilled.

4. Rajarshi's philosophy: Kirat perspective and the indigenous foundation of self-knowledge

King Siradhwaja Janaka is given the high title of 'Rajarshi' (a sage-like figure, even though he was a king). In the ancient Upanishads (especially the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad), King Janaka's court was a philosophical assembly where the great scholars and sages of India would come to participate in the discourses on the soul and Brahman (Schöttli, 2014).

Interestingly, even great Vedic sages (like Yajnavalkya) sought the help of King Janaka to find answers to some mysterious and spiritual questions. This incident is very important from an anthropological point of view. It shows that King Janaka's philosophy was completely different from the established Vedic rituals (ritual-based sacrifices, sacrifices and priesthood) and was directly based on 'experience and self-knowledge'. (Mysticism) It was based on.

Philosophical dimension	Mediterranean Vedic tradition	Janak and Kiranti worldviews
1. Center point	External sacrifices, fire worship, animal sacrifices, mantras	Inner self-knowledge, identification with nature
2. The nature of God	Anthropomorphic and classified deities	Inhumanity, the invisible power of nature and the earth
3. Source of knowledge	Written Scripture and Priestly Intercession	Direct experience and ancestral oral tradition
4. Main symbols	The altar of sacrifice and the temple's spire	The line of the plow and the soil of the earth (Sita)

This self-knowledge and direct experience-based thinking is actually the core essence of Kirat Mundhum philosophy (Kaila, 1995). The Kirats believe more in the direct experience of nature and their inner spiritual power (mukku) than in external rituals or outward worship. This

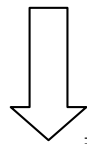
'videha darshan' (consciousness rising above the body or physical body) that developed in the court of King Janak is actually a unique meeting point of the primitive indigenous knowledge of the Himalayas and the Vedic knowledge of the plains (Syncretic Point) (Bista, 1991).

It was because of this deep attachment of Janak to the soil that he considered his daughter Sita, whom he had obtained from the earth, as the greatest pride of his clan. Later, when this philosophy was recorded in Sanskrit texts, its primitive, ecocentric and tribal essence was gradually removed, and it was limited to a purely Hindu Vedanta philosophy. (Subba, 1999) I

5. Archaeological and geographical evidence: a historical bridge between the hills and the plains

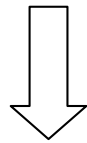
Geographical location and ancient migration patterns of eastern Nepal If we look at the history, it is clear that there is a strong and unbreakable connection between Janakpur and the hill Kirat region. Geographically, Janakpurdham is located in such a strategic location from where the hill Kirat regions (such as historical Khotang, Bhojpur, Udayapur and Sindhuli) and the flat plains of the Terai are very close (Upreti, 2011).

[Hill Kirant Region: Khotang / Bhojpur / Udayapur]



(Seasonal migration and ancient trade routes)

=====> { Janakpurdham (Ancient Videha Center) } <=====



(Management of wetlands and marshlands of the Terai)

[Southern Plain / Gangetic Basin]

Since ancient times, people in this region have been climbing mountains according to the seasons (going down in winter and up in summer). They used to travel back and forth between these two regions. The rivers like Kamala and Jalad, which flowed from the mountains, determined this route.

Anthropological evidence of archaeological remains

Some sporadic excavations in Janakpur and its surrounding area, especially in the lower levels of the historic Dhanushadham and old ponds, prove that the history here is much older than mediaeval Rajput or Sen architecture (Gaudel, 2020). Primitive stone tools found there and long, flat earthenware vessels of a different type from the Khas-Aryan style. And the structure of the old wells shows that there was a tribal settlement here in ancient times whose life was completely connected to nature and the culture of the pond (Gaudel, 2020).

How to manage water by digging ponds and prevent malaria in this extremely hot and swampy environment of the Terai? Only those indigenous peoples, the sons of the land, had the

indigenous knowledge of how to settle down and fight against it (Dahal, 1985). Later, when new rulers from outside came to power here, they built their magnificent temples on the foundations of these old ponds and settlements, thereby pushing the ancient archaeological history underground.

6. Politics of transformation: Sanskritisation journey of Janaki Samma after seeing the Siradhvaj

Despite having such a strong foundation of Kirat history and indigenous philosophy, how did King Siradhvaj and Janakpurdham come to be completely limited to the Hindu narrative of the Ramayana? This transformation is not a one-day event; it is a 'Sanskritisation' driven by the state, the priesthood, and the market over centuries. And it is a planned long journey of political assimilation (Bista, 1991)!

The process of this transformation can be understood by dividing it into three main stages:

Stage 1: Oral folklore]	Stage 2: Sanskrit text writing]	[Stage 3: Physical architectural construction]
- Of the indigenous Videha emperor	– Included in the Ramayana and Puranas	– Construction of the Janaki temple
- The Saga of Soil and Labour	– Merger into the Nimi/Ikshvaku Dynasty	– Purna Hindu Vaishnava Shaktipeeth

Phase 1: Sanskritisation of oral folktales

During the early phase, the Vedic and the Aryan cultures moved northward from the plains of the Ganges, but there was no way they could discard the glamour of the rich Terai rulers and the kingdoms they commanded. Hence, they chose to transpose the local lore and the deeds of the kings of Videha into Sanskrit and translate it into their Vedas, Upanishads and Puranas (Thapar, 1984). In this process, the tribal identity of the Kirat king Siradhvaj was gradually erased, and he was associated with mythological Hindu clans such as the Suryavansh or Chandravansh, so that his acceptance could be established in mainstream Aryan society (Sharma, 2004).

Phase 2: Political use of the Ramayana epic

Valmiki's Ramayana and later the mediaeval 'Ramcharitmanas' by Tulsidas completely moulded the geography of Janakpur and its characters into the mould of an ideal Hindu society. King Janak was made an ideal Hindu father, and Sita was made an ideal Hindu daughter-in-law and a symbol of chastity (Jha, 1971). What this literary management did was to completely erase the image of the tribal chieftain, who ploughed the land and was connected to the soil, from the minds of the people, and instead, the image of a king who lived in a magnificent palace, wore a

crown, and served the Brahmins was established.

Phase 3: Physical architecture and construction of Janaki Temple

The final and strongest physical link in this transformation is the magnificent Janaki Temple, built in 1910 by Queen Vrishabhanu Kunwari of Tikamgarh (Gaudel, 2020). It is also known as the 'Naulakha Temple' in the local dialect, as it was built at a cost of nine lakh rupees.

If we look at the architecture of this temple, it is not in the traditional pagoda style or prehistoric style of Nepal but rather in the Rajput and Mughal style of India. Built in a mixed form of architecture, this magnificent white marble and brick structure buried all the old indigenous remains underground. The life-enshrined idols inside the temple and the arrival of Vaishnava saints transformed Janakpur into a thriving Hindu pilgrimage site, due to which its ancient Kirat heritage was confined only to the books of researchers (Jha, 1971).

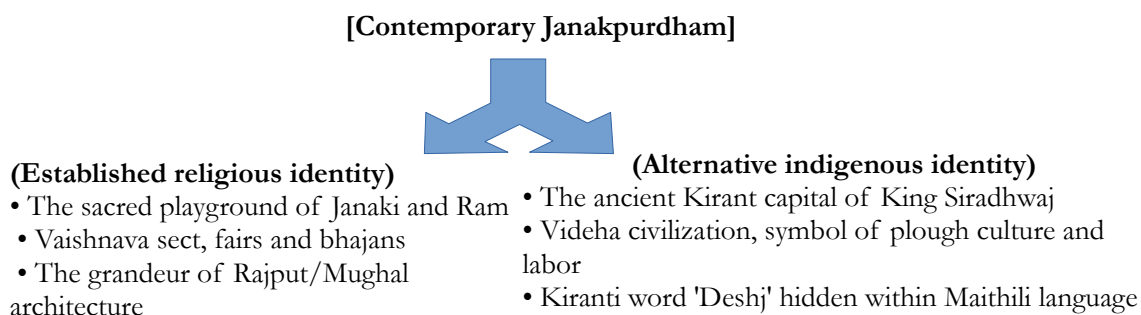
7. Socio-cultural impact: Two parallel identities of contemporary Janakpur

In today's modern era, there are two completely different and parallel identities in Janakpur dham society (dual identities). Various anthropologists have reported these identities in contradiction or in conjunction with each other (Pathak, 2012).

1. Devotees and Mainstream Religious Identity: For ordinary Hindu pilgrims, tourists and other visitors, Janakpur dham is the holy Vaikuntha Dham of Devi Janaki and Lord Shri Ram.

They make a sacred dip in various holy tanks on the auspicious occasions like Vivah Panchami, Ram Navami and Chhath festivals and offer prayers at the Janaki temple in order to gain some positive outcome for their lives. They see this city as the living instance of the mythological Ramayana.

2. Recognition of historians and indigenous activists: On the other hand, for anthropologists, Kirat activists and progressive historians, Janakpur dham is the historical capital of King Siradhwaj, the great creator of the ancient Videha civilisation, the carrier of the plough revolution and the promoter of the Rajarshi philosophy (Subba, 1999). They see the footprints of primitive indigenous labour and Mongoloid ancestors buried beneath the white marble of this city.



Maithili culture and indigenous relics

This cultural blend and intermixture is still alive in the contemporary Maithili language and its folk culture. It is considered a member of the language family, but a deep study of its grammar and vocabulary reveals that it contains abundant 'native'. There is a plurality of words (Subba, 1999).

According to linguists, these 'native' words have not come from anywhere else but have been adapted from ancient Kirat and indigenous languages. Similarly, the traditional games played even today in the indigenous society of Janakpur and the famous Mithila art painted on the walls of houses. The rituals seen in nature, the worship of soil, fish, and trees, and the worship of the 'Gram Devi' (Dihawar) in villages are basically a continuation of the same primitive Kirat and nature-worshipping traditions of King Siradhvaj's court (Jha, 1971). These folk rituals show that, although the established classical religion changed the form of the temple, it could never change the indigenous blood that flowed in the daily lives of the people at the grassroots level.

8. Preserving intangible history: Future strategies for academic funding

There is a need for serious and systematic research in the coming days to prove this neglected Kirat history of Janakpurdham and the real indigenous foundation of the Videha civilisation, not just limited to an emotional slogan but also in the modern academic and scientific world. For this, it is overdue to work on the following three strategic areas:

Three pillars of future research		
[1. Linguistic mapping]	[2. Deep excavation]	[3. Oral history collection]
- To investigate the etymological relationships and shared linguistic traits between indigenous Maithil and Kiranti lexicons.	- To conduct a stratigraphic analysis of the ancient soil and structural layers surrounding Janaki Mandir to establish their chronological sequence and historical development.	- To document and analyze the oral histories, ritual recitations, and sacred genealogies preserved by indigenous shamans and priests to evaluate their role in recording royal lineages and historical governance.

1. Systematic linguistic mapping

Thousands of 'native' words, old village names in the Maithili language (toponyms). A comprehensive scientific comparative study of the structural and phonetic similarities between the Kirat (Rai, Limbu, Sunuwar, and Dhimal) languages should be conducted. This will go a long way in historically confirming the common linguistic and ancestral roots of the Videha clan.

2. Modern archaeological excavations

All the old sites within and in the vicinity of Janakpurdham need to be extensively explored through deep excavation of the old temple remains and bottom of the pond through high-tech technology (like carbon dating and GPR survey). This will provide physical evidence of

prehistoric tribal civilisations that predate the Rajput or Sen periods that will be brought to the world (Gaudel, 2020).

3. Collection and documentation of oral Mundhum traditions

Even before the older generations were lost due to modern urbanisation and the increasing influence of Western culture, the oral narratives related to the history of the kings of the Terai and Sirdhwaj Janak, preserved in the minds of the ancient world experts (Samba, Phedangma, and Naxo) in the hilly and Terai regions, were rapidly documented with audio-video (Subba, 1999).

9. Conclusion: The historical restoration of King Siradhwaj and the path forward

Viewed through the three-time anthropological lens of the past, present and future, Janakpurdham is not just a city of temples confined within a narrow religious boundary. It is a vast and vibrant historical monument of primitive "tribal sovereignty" and geo-cultural identity. Today's modern society should learn to re-establish and respect King Janak not just as a thin mythological character of the Ramayana epic or a king who can be compressed into a hymn, but rather as that great tribal ruler of the Kirat dynasty, Emperor Siradhwaj, who, in the early days of history, had made the tool of labour, like the plough, the supreme flag (symbol of power) of his kingdom and had laid the foundation of a culture that worshipped the soil of the earth as a goddess (Subba, 1999).

When we look at the gleaming white marble and magnificent Mughal-Rajput-style domes of the Janaki Temple, our conscience and eyes should also be able to see the glorious shadow of the ancient Kirat Palace hidden beneath that building and the blood and sweat of the sons of the land.

The main reason why Janakpurdham continues to be the spiritual heart of Nepal and the eastern subcontinent is that it was built not by modern corporate capital or single-caste pride but by the hard-working hands of those innocent indigenous people for thousands of years and the Videha (self-knowledge-centred) wisdom of King Siradhwaj. Restoring this lost link in history would be the most visionary and historic way to make contemporary Nepali society truly inclusive, balanced, just, and loyal to its soil.

National Demographic Perspective (Factual Note):

History of intermingling between Maithili & Kirat (mainly Rai-Limbu): How to rephrase it in short sentences in English and give concrete linguistic examples is the following: According to Nepal's latest national census, 2021, the Kirat ethnic group population in the country is estimated at above 1.2 million. Kirats are made up of several groups like the Rai, Limbu, Sunuwar and the Yakkha communities. In terms of current political geography, it is evident that the Maithil population forms the clear majority in the Madhesh Province of Nepal and the city of Janakpurdham. However, this anthropological study has interpreted the ancient relationship differently.

According to the study, the lineage of rulers from the pre-historic period connects these

two communities. In addition, there was also an ancient biological and linguistic connection between the hills and the Terai. Even today, there are many such 'native' words in the Maithili language, whose roots are directly connected to the Kirat or Bhot-Burmese language family.

For example, some specific words used in the Maithili language to describe household items or nature in the village can be seen:

Maithili desaj 'indigenous' word	Meaning	Kiranti/Native roots (similarity)
Tang/'Tangi	Hanging rod or weapon	Kirat is similar to 'tang' (head/staff) in the Limbu language and 'tanga' in the Rai language.
Jhaankhar /Jhankh	Jungle, shrub or dense forest	It corresponds to the word 'jak/jhak', which means 'vegetation' in Kiranti Mundhumi nature worship.
Changi /Chang	Wooden or bamboo upper floor/shelf	It is believed that this word migrated to the Terai from the 'chang', a type of storage structure built by the Kirats of the eastern hills.
Khoila/Khoili	Corn husk or inner covering	This matches the traditional tone used in the Kirat Rai language to refer to the husk of corn or grain.

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Chapter 9: The Cultural Homeland of Eastern Nepal: Rediscovering the Unbroken History of Kirat, Bideha, and Janakpur

1. Introduction: Looking through Kathmandu-centric lenses

If you look through the history books of Nepal that have been written so far, you will realise one thing clearly – our history writing has revolved around the Kathmandu Valley for a very long time. The valley's magnificent Malla-era palaces, pagoda-style temples, and the beautiful harmony of Hindu-Buddhist philosophy have been considered the cultural map of the entire Nepal (Sharma, 2004). But is Nepal all there is? Of course not. Beyond this limited commentary on Kathmandu, the vast plains and rolling green hills of eastern Nepal harbour a rich, complex, and vibrant history. This history is not a story of the monopoly of any one race or religion. It is a story of cultural, genetic, and historical interactions between the prehistoric civilisations that migrated north from the Indo-Gangetic Plains and the indigenous tribes that have lived for generations in the lap of the Himalayas. And it is a great story of political trends.

The strongest, brightest and most undisputed symbol of the history of this region is the Videha emperor, King Siradhvaj Janak, and his glorious capital, Janakpurdham. Mainstream established history and religious media have always presented Janakpur only as a supreme, classical centre of Vedic Aryan civilisation (Jha, 1971). But is this the whole truth? In the light of anthropology, linguistics, and recent genetic research, this traditional view seems very incomplete and one-sided.

[Established Kathmandu-centred commentary]	[New academic/anthropological perspective]
- Hindu-Buddhist conflict and harmony	The ancient biological bridge between the hills and the plains
- Written classical history	- Oral history of folk and indigenous labor.
- The Spectacle of Imported Sanskritisation	– The Rediscovery of Kirat-Videha Civilization

The main thrust and academic argument of this research-based article is that ancient Janakpur and the entire Videha region were not actually an imported culture. It was essentially a highly sophisticated and advanced pre-historical expression of the ancient Kirat (or Kirat-Mongoloid) cultural stream (Chatterji, 1951; Chemjong, 2003). Over time, as the influence of Vedic priests and political forces from the south increased in this region, a long and subtle

'Sanskritisation' took place here (Bista, 1991). This process obscured the primitive aspects of indigenous identity by dressing it up with vermilion and clothing from the outside, but it could not completely eradicate it from the blood, language, and folk culture that flowed through the daily lives of the people (Subba, 1999).

Therefore, in this chapter, we will not just talk about emotions. We will talk directly to the readers, using ancient historical documents, unique indigenous words in languages, and the DNA of human blood. We will examine this historical truth with the help of markers, archaeological possibilities hidden underground, and folk-cultural evidence that still lives in every household today. We hope to expand this understanding into a newer and richer notion of history to enrich and familiarise tomorrow's Nepalese national identity.

2. King Siradhwaj Janaka: The living embodiment of the philosophy of agriculture

Come on, let us pause for a moment. When we speak of 'King Janak', what do we really envision? Perhaps the face of some mythical king wearing a magnificent golden crown, sitting on a throne, and surrounded by Brahmins reciting the Vedas comes to mind, right? But if we slowly wash away his later religious colours and look only at his real name, a very interesting and eye-opening aspect of history is revealed. The scriptures say that the real name of that Videha emperor was 'Siradhwaja' (Pathak, 2012). Let's delve into the inner meaning of this word. In Sanskrit, 'Sir' has a direct meaning—'plough' or 'the line formed on the ground by ploughing'. And we all know the meaning of 'Dhwaj'—'flag' or 'flag of victory'.

Therefore, the literal and philosophical meaning of Siradhwaj is "a ruler who makes the halo the flag of his empire or the supreme symbol of power" (Pathak, 2012). Now consider, while other ancient kings of the world kept violent and warlike symbols like swords, lions, eagles or thunderbolts on their flags, this king of the Terai of eastern Nepal made a simple farming plough his identity. It was not just a name; it was a manifesto of an entire human civilisation and a production-orientated philosophy of life.

[Jungle/Hunter Age]	[Deforestation and logging]	[Siradhwaj's 'Plough Revolution' (Agricultural Age)]
(Search for nature)	(The native gate above the land)	(Soil and labor are the flag of power)

If we look at the historical transformation of ancient Kirat society, they gradually moved from a primitive state of hunting and searching for roots in the forest to an agricultural society of permanent cultivation by clearing the land. The Agricultural Revolution was entering (Chemjong, 2003). This figure of King Siradhwaj is in fact a supreme, indigenous and tribal representation of that epoch-making agricultural revolution. He was not a king who fell from the sky, but rather he was a true 'son of the soil' who made his deep biological and labour relationship with the soil the foundation of his political glory (Subba, 1999).

In this context, let us once again pay attention to the amazing story of the birth of Sita as described in the Ramayana. The story goes that while King Janak was ploughing the land for a yagna, the baby Sita emerged from the womb of the earth after being hit by the ploughshare. This

story is not just a magical event; it is a very beautiful metaphor of anthropology. What this indicates is that the real power, wealth, and goddess (Lakshmi) of a state are not in any gold mines or military force, but rather in the fertile power of the land and the sweat of the farmers.

Anthropologist Dor Bahadur Bista (1991) refers to this link in his famous book 'Fatalism and Development' and calls it "a beautiful historical confluence of tribal self-knowledge and nature worship." This confluence is the fundamental basis of Kirat Mundhum philosophy, where there is no god greater than soil and nature (Subba, 2025). Therefore, both Siradhwaj and Sita are symbolically living representations of the nature-centred, hard-working, and productive outlook on life of ancient Kirat society, which was given a Vedic colour over time.

3. Linguistic evidence: The Kirat base hidden in the womb of the Maithili language

It is said that language is the brain of any human society. If you want to discover the ancient history of any geography and the true roots of its people, look at the inner layers of the language spoken there. The local language, Maithili, serves as a very strong historical witness to understanding the indigenous roots of Janakpur and the entire Videh region.

Important and authoritative studies done by eminent Indian scholar and linguist Prof. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee have well-established the fact that the ancient Videha Republic (Janakpur) and the Shakya Kingdom of Kapilvastu (birthplace of Gautam Buddha) belong to Kirat, the Indio-Mongoloid group, both in language and culture (Chatterji, 1951). The language family had a profound and indelible impact (as cited in Chemjong, 2003).

Looking at the structure of the modern Maithili language, it shows a predominance of two types of words:

1. Tatsam/Tadbhava: Which have been modified from Sanskrit or Prakrit languages.
2. Indigenous (Deshaja): Which is not found in any Sanskrit text but has been used by the indigenous elders here in their speech for thousands of years.

In fact, these 'native' words are the real soul and indigenous roots of the Maithili language. Many modern linguistic studies have proven that most of these native words of Maithili originate from the ancient Kirat (Tibeto-Burmese) or Austro-Asiatic language families (Subba, 1999). Come on, readers! Let's take a closer look at some concrete linguistic examples used in everyday life, which will help open our eyes:

1. Pahi: Even today, in Maithili, a guest or newcomer to a village is called 'pahi' (e.g., 'pahi lokan'). Interestingly, 'pahi' is also used in the Kirat (especially Rai) languages of the eastern hills. The literal meaning of "visitor" is a person or guest who comes from outside one's village.

2. Dabra: A small puddle or natural pond where water collects in the fields of Madhes is called 'dabara' or 'dabari' in Maithili. The same word is also used in the Kirat settlements of eastern Nepal to refer to a small water source or swamp in the same sense.

3. Kuti: A small rustic hut or dwelling is called 'kuti' in Maithili (e.g., 'kutir'). This word is a common property of the Tibeto-Burmese language family, where a small shelter made of bamboo and leaves is called 'kuti' or 'kham-kuti'.

These linguistic similarities cannot be mere coincidence. The fact that words in two

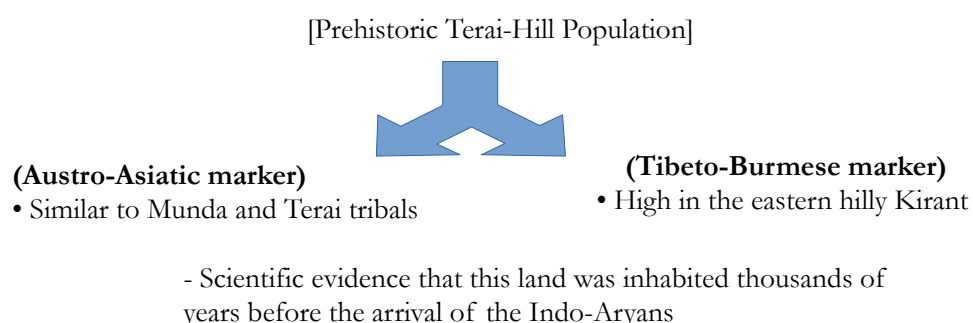
different geographies and language families are so closely related suggests one thing that the Kirat languages, at least among the lower strata of the population of Janakpur and Videha in the prehistoric period, were at least as deep and ancient as the later Sanskrit or Avahatta (Subba, 1999). Language is such a living organism which cannot be easily erased by any political change.

Maithili 'Deshaj' and Kiranti linguistic bridge		
Maithili words	Kiranti roots	Shared cultural meanings
• Pahi	• Pahi	A person coming from outside, a guest or a newcomer
• Dabara	• Kuti/Kham-Kuti	A small hut or traditional dwelling made of bamboo or wood
• Tang/tangi	• Tang/tanga	A hanging rod, a tool or weapon for carrying firewood

4. Genetic evidence: history etched in tiny particles of blood

Science has made such great strides in recent times that we no longer have to rely solely on old, tattered documents or legends to understand history. If language shows cultural connections, then so does the DNA inside a human body. Their true blood relationship. In recent years, there have been some very large and startling studies into the genetic history of the Nepalese population.

In this context, a comprehensive and historic genetic study conducted by renowned scientist Kushwaha and his international colleagues in 2020 can be considered (Kushwaha et al., 2020). They collected DNA samples from the bodies of the original indigenous peoples of the Terai region of Nepal (such as Tharu, Rajbanshi, and Dhimal) and the Kirat communities of the eastern hills (Rai and Limbu) and conducted comparative analysis in a scientific laboratory. The findings of this research dealt a major blow to the historiography of the entire South Asia.



The study showed that the blood of the natives of the Terai and the Kirats of the mountains has "Austro-Asiatic" and "Tibeto-Burmese" genetic markers found in very high and common quantities (Kushwaha et al., 2020). This marker was completely different and older than

that of the Indo-Aryan language group people from Northern India.

The direct and clear meaning of this scientific discovery is that this flat land of the Terai and inner Madhesh of Nepal was inhabited by a distinct indigenous population, long before the arrival of the Indo-Aryans from outside, thousands of years ago. Their blood was directly related to the hill Kirats and the Tharu-Dhimals of the Terai.

Therefore, the ancient population of King Siradhwaj Janak's kingdom Videha and his capital Janakpur were originally descendants of this tribal group (Kushwaha et al., 2020). Modern genetic science completely disproves the assumption that this population was purely Aryan from the North Indian plains. Instead, it offers concrete, scientific evidence linking the Kirat and the Videha.

5. Archaeological Possibilities: Historical Answers Hidden in the Soil of Janakpur

Readers, the most concrete and irrefutable physical evidence that finally proves the claims of history is the archaeological remains hidden underground. Sadly, the Department of Archaeology of Nepal and state policies have not yet allowed any large-scale, scientific, and systematic excavations in Janakpur and its surrounding ancient sites. Whatever construction or excavations took place here were limited to superficial work such as beautifying the temple or cleaning the pond (Jha, 1971). However, if we look deeper into the unique geography and indigenous traditions here, we find many such sites whose subsurface scientific excavations can easily reveal physical evidence of the Kirat-Videha civilisation (Gaudel, 2020). Let's take an academic tour of those potential locations:

[Archaeological importance of Janakpur]		
- Primitive nature and stone worship	- ancient administrative centers	- Prehistoric pottery
- Stone weapons and old hearths	- Layered study of soil	- Possibility of finding Eastern Hill Kiranti remains (Stratigraphic Analysis) Similarity to the dishes

A. Dense forest area of Dhanushadham

Dhanushadham, located a few kilometres north of Janakpur, is today considered the sacred place where Lord Shiva's bow fell. However, from the perspective of an indigenous anthropologist, its main attraction lies in its natural environment. The huge agate stones, ancient dense forests and proximity to the river indicate that this place was a place of primitive 'nature worship' for the indigenous people in prehistoric times. And the stone altar (like Chotlung) was a major centre. There are no man-made temples in Kirat religion; for them, the forest and the stone are the abode of God (Subba, 1999). If the lower surface of Dhanushadham is excavated scientifically, there is a very high possibility of finding ancient stone weapons, remains of stoves used by primitive people, and materials from the pre-Vedic period (Gaudel, 2020).

B. 52 bighas of land and open field of Angraj Head (sir)

This vast open area near the Janakpur Temple was a major social or administrative centre in ancient times. It seems that there is a stratigraphic study of the soil in this area. If we do, many pages of history will be opened. If we can find remains of the Kirat period (such as Mongoloid-style weapons or black earthenware vessels without a base) in the lower ground level, much below the bricks of the mediaeval Hindu temple here, it will reveal the pre-Hindu cultural level of this civilisation. It will be scientifically proven to the world.

C. Old mounds of Kurtha and Pipra (Kapileshwar)

Some small natural mounds still exist in these areas today. The local people have been considering these hills as ordinary *deurali*, or hills. However, initial archaeological surveys of these hills revealed that they were built in the 10th century BC. Old pottery from the past (Gaudel, 2020). Surprisingly, the type of clay, their thickness and the style of construction of these pots are very similar to the ancient Kirat pots found in the hilly districts of eastern Nepal. This geographical and archaeological similarity makes it clear how strong the cultural and commercial exchanges were between the people of the Terai and the hills in ancient times.

6. Cultural similarities: Living indigenous links in the fabric of daily life

The real and true definition of civilisation is not just in the names of kings, great wars or written scriptures. It is hidden in the small rituals, customs, food and lifestyle adopted by the common people in their daily lives. If we look closely at the modern Maithili culture and the Pahari Kirat culture, we find so many deep similarities in the pattern of their social life, which irrefutably proves their common pre-historical background (Subba, 1999).

A. Traditional worship of nature and village goddess (Diwar)

Even today, on the edge of every village in Madhesh, there is an open space where there is no idol, only a tree or a stone. It is called 'Gram-Devi' or 'Dihawar' (protector god of the village) in Maithil society. On special days of the year, the entire village gathers to worship there.

This is completely different from the idol worship of established Hinduism. It is exactly the Terai form of the Kirats' 'Yuma Sammag' or the Rais' 'Sayachong' (ancestor and land power) worship (Chemjong, 2003; Subba, 1999). The basic philosophical basis of both cultures is the same—God does not reside in a dark room of a temple or in a metal statue, but rather in open nature, at the foot of an old tree, on a smooth stone, and in a spring of water. This is a spirituality based on direct experience. It is the common property of both communities.

B. Marriage rituals and the use of plants

The Maithili society's marriage system is very long and complex. However, let's look at some of the traditional rituals within it – the use of *dubo*, bamboo leaves, *simal* branches, and raw ginger is mandatory in marriage.

Folk rituals such as 'airi-bairi', especially performed at the wedding hall to ward off evil spirits or negative energies, are very similar to the Kirat Mundhum wedding rituals (Subba, 2025).

These methods do not come from any Vedic Brahmanical texts; they are much older shamanic Or are remnants of the Dhimi-Jhankri belief system, which was later cleverly incorporated into Hindu marriage.

C. Food and traditional lifestyle

The most permanent and unchanging element of culture is food. Ghongi, a dish found in the Maithil community of Madhesh, is the custom of eating snails, wild tubers (yams), and special types of indigenous vegetables that are in perfect harmony with the traditional diet of the Kirats of the eastern hills (Chemjong, 2003).

This similarity in diet is not a coincidence. What it proves is that these two communities had lived together for thousands of years in the same geographical and ecological environment, developing their way of life from shared natural resources. The same terrain had shaped their lifestyles in a similar way.

7. Kings of the Terai in the Mundhum tradition: Strong evidence from oral history

We must always remember one thing—the history of the tribal Kirat society is more in their oral traditions than in written books. It has been very safe and alive in the world. If we listen carefully to the verses of the Kirats' sacred oral scripture 'Mundhum' (Limbu) or 'Muddum' (Rai), we will find frequent mention of the plains of the Terai and the plains of the Madhes. (Kaila, 1995). In several old verses of Mundhum, it is said that the blessings of the ancestors are sought:

The essence of the Mundhum verse:

"O our ancient ancestors! May the morale and strength of our descendants remain intact, from the high snowy peaks of the mountains to the vast grain-growing plains; may they rule this land with justice."

This shows that the historical presence and consciousness of the Kirats were not limited to the narrow valleys of the mountains; their empire and migration extended to the plains of the Terai. The famous Kirat historian Iman Singh Chemjong (2003) has clearly argued in his research that the Videha emperor Raja Janak was actually the 'hang' of the Kirat kings (Hang). Among them, a particular branch of the family developed a remarkably progressive and fair administration in the fertile lands of the Terai.

Who built the structure?

The ancient memories are so interconnected with the history and culture of Halesi (Halesung) in the mountains of Eastern Nepal and Janakpur in the Terai through an invisible link (Subba, 2023).

This folklore carries substantial weight towards revealing a bigger reality which was wilfully omitted from the mainstream recorded history.

8. Sanskritisation: A clever process of Hinduizing a tribal history

What actually now raises concerns? If the story of Janakpur and King Siradhwaj Janak has been tribal in nature from the core, why was it wholly presented as an incarnation of a Hindu

deity?

To understand this mystery, we need to understand a very important principle of anthropology and sociology that is called 'Sanskritisation'. It is called the process of cultural transformation (Bista, 1991; Sharma, 2004).

Looking at the period of history, especially the Gupta Empire in India. After the rise and expansion of the 1st century, the political and religious influence of Brahmanical Hindu culture in North India began to grow rapidly. In this vein, the priests and scholars of the empire gradually modified the established Hindu religious framework by incorporating local tribal beliefs, nature-worshipping deities, and the history of indigenous kings (Thapar, 1984). The case of King Siradhwaja Janaka and his Videha kingdom is a classical and world-famous example of this Sanskritisation process.

[Original Kirant Krishnayak: Siradhwaj]	→ [Sanskritisation mythological coating]	→ [Hindu incarnation commentary]
- Plow flag and soil worship	- Inclusion in Ikshvaku/Surya dynasty	- Janaki temple and Vaishnava Dham
- Practical philosophy of self-knowledge	- Main character of the epic Ramayana– Main character of the epic Ramayana	- Rituals, the centre of the caste system

In this process, the original Kirat agricultural god or hero king Siradhwaja was incorporated into the later Hindu Puranas as a king of the 'Ikshvaku' or 'Nimi' dynasty, the dynasty of King Rama of Ayodhya (Sharma, 2004). His original identity based on soil and labour was completely overshadowed by a new, shiny and dramatic story (such as the story of Shiva breaking his bow and Sita's swayambar and marriage to Rama). Thus, the primitive "eighth tribal sovereignty" of Janakpur (which was based on agriculture, nature and practical self-knowledge) was legally replaced by a "Vedic sovereignty" (which was based on sacrifice, the caste system and priestly rituals) (Bista, 1991).

But, readers! No matter how clever this process of Sanskritisation was, it could not completely erase the original essence of history. Even today, in the Ramayana and the Upanishads, King Janak is depicted not as a warlike or sacrificial king like other traditional Hindu kings but as an independent 'king-rishi' who rose above established rituals, debated knowledge with the sages, and considered 'self-knowledge' supreme (Schöttli, 2014). This depiction is more in line with the practical, logical, and nature-centred philosophical tradition of the Kirats than with the established Hindu tradition.

9. A comprehensive cultural map of eastern Nepal: Janakpur is just the beginning

What we need to understand clearly is that this shared history of Janakpur and King Janak is not a phenomenon like an isolated or separate island in Eastern Nepal. It is just a small section of a whole vast geo-cultural map. Our entire book "Cultural Identities of Eastern Nepal" is actually trying to open the pages of this historical map one by one. The geography of

Eastern Nepal is home to many such amazing cultural confluences. It is full of stories, which clearly show how the ancient Kirat roots were assimilated by later Hindu and Buddhist traditions (Gaenszle, 2002; Subba, 1999). Let's briefly look at some other key points on this map:

Barahakshetra (Sunsari): The sacred confluence of the Kosi and Koka rivers. Established Hindu mythology links it to Mahavaraha, the third incarnation of Vishnu. However, if we dig into its history, it was a major nature-worship centre for the primitive fishermen and Kirat communities here, offering oblations to 'Koshi Mai' (the goddess of nature and rivers) long before the temple was built.

Dharan and Budha Subba (Sunsari): The Budha Subba temple, located in the heart of Dharan city, is a prime example of this. The main deity here is not a Hindu scripture god but a very powerful primitive ancestor (Sammang) of the Yakthung (Limbu), where even today it is a traditional belief not to wear bamboo tops and to offer vermilion. Later, with the expansion of the market and the state, an attempt was made to integrate it religiously by linking it with the nearby Hindu Shaktipeeth 'Dantakali' (Gaenszle, 2002).

Halesi Mahadev (Khotang): This famous cave in eastern Nepal is the hiding place of Mahadev for Hindus, while for Tibetan Buddhists it is the 'Maratika' cave where Guru Padmasambhava attained immortality. However, if we look at its linguistic roots, it is clear that the word comes from the Kirat Rai language, 'Halesung' (hollow land or ancestral area) (Pathak, 2012). This is a common mix of all three religions. It is the centre.

Mukkumlung (Pathibhara, Taplejung): At an altitude of 3794 metres, this is the highest Chotlung of the Yakthung people. There is neither any man-made structure nor idols here but plain natural rock beneath the sky (Subba, 2023). At present this, together with the cable car issue, has been the biggest theatre of struggle between indigenous identity and capitalist markets.

[Cultural Confluence of Eastern Nepal]			
[Janakpurdham]	[Barahakshetra]	[Budha Subba]	[Halesi Cave]
- Kirant-Videh civilisation	- Majhi/Kirant river worship	- Limbu ancestral Sammang	- Kiranti 'Halesung'
- Philosophy of the Plough and Soil	- Origin of 'Koshimai'	- Alignment with Dantakali	- Tri-Religious Confluence

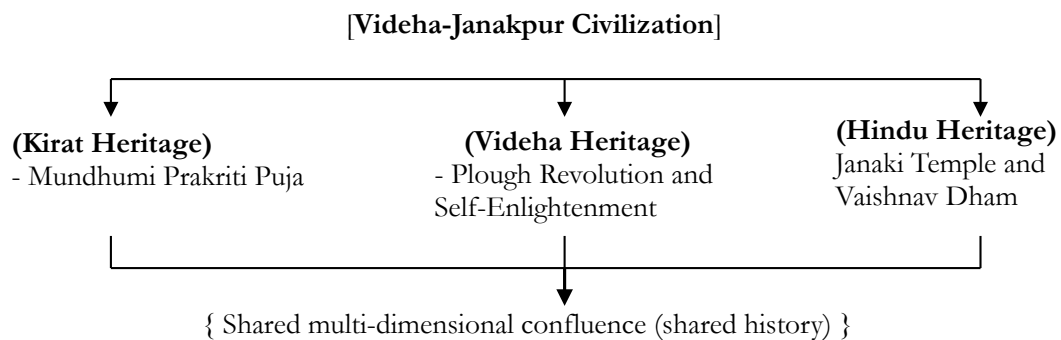
Behind all these sacred sites is a common anthropological process, known in anthropology as 'place-making'. It is said that the ancient people of the land had preserved their religious beliefs, mythological stories, and historical memories for millions of years in these geographical rocks and forests. Later, new cultures and rulers assimilated these already sacred energetic sites and added their own stories. In this way, a multi-layered cultural geography developed, each layer of which hides a different truth of history.

10. Conclusion: Rediscovering a shared heritage and an inclusive Nepal for tomorrow

Readers! We have reached the final stage of this historical chapter. It is now clear that this history of Janakpurdham and eastern Nepal is not simple, straightforward or one-dimensional. It is not a story. It is a vast epic of thousands of years of coexistence, ideological exchange, conflict, and fusion between the biological bridge between the mountains and the plains, indigenous nature worship, and new global religious systems.

The Videha Emperor King Siradhvaj Janaka is not a fictional character in this saga; he is our historical ancestor whose plough represents the labour of the Kirat agricultural philosophy, whose daughter Sita's soil represents the unbreakable human relationship with nature, and whose just administration represents the shared social values of this land (Subba, 1999).

Rediscovering this forgotten aspect of history is not a racial whim for modern Nepal; it is the greatest need and justice of the time. As long as we continue to write our history only through the eyes of the Kathmandu court or the Khas kings of western Nepal, our national history will always remain incomplete. This common indigenous heritage of eastern Nepal teaches us a great truth—cultural identity is never static, narrow, or one-sided. It is always flowing, changing, and interactive, like the water of a river.



Therefore, calling Janakpurdham only a "Kirat heritage" or only a "Hindu heritage" would be an exploitation and incompleteness of history. The most correct, balanced and just approach is to accept this land as a "common and historical meeting place of Kirat-Videha-Hindu civilisations". Only this approach does justice to our sense of history and opens a new path for the future generations to build a strong, inclusive and intimate Nepal. The real need now is not just to talk but to conduct systematic archaeological excavations at the state level, collect serious oral histories from elders and conduct interdisciplinary research. The goal is to advance the study so that the true mirror of this shared heritage can shine forever.

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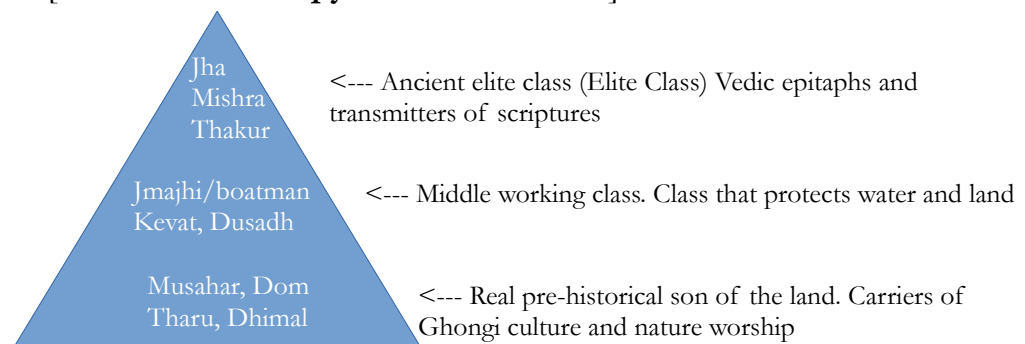
Chapter 10: The Social Pyramid of Videha Civilization: An Anthropological Discussion of Maithili Elites, Indigenous Landowners, and Intangible Kirat Relics

1. Introduction: The complexity of history hidden within the social fabric of Madhes

The social and cultural makeup of Janakpur, considered the heart of Madhesh Province and especially the ancient Videha Republic, has always been viewed by the outside world only through a flat and one-dimensional mirror. The established mainstream narrative considered Janakpur to be only a Vedic land where King Janak recited the scriptures, Yajnavalkya composed the Upanishads, and the people were completely Indian and steeped in language and high Hindu culture (Jha, 1971).

However, when we enter the inner layers of this society through the lens of a skilled anthropologist and indigenous cultural expert, we discover a very complex, multifaceted, and contradictory social pyramid of history. This pyramid is such that the culture, language, and lifestyle of those living at the top are completely different from those of the original inhabitants living at the bottom (Thapar, 1984).

[Historical social pyramid of Madhes]



In present-day Madhesh society, the Maithili Brahmins and Kayasthas, known as the upper castes such as Jha, Thakur, Mishra or Chaudhary, are seen as the majority among the classes that speak Maithili, are close to state power, and dominate intellectual discourse (Jha, 1971). This raises a serious question in the minds of modern researchers - are these elite classes the real indigenous people of this land, from the early days of the Videha civilisation, who have been the indigenous 'snails' of the prehistoric period? Are they maintaining a culture of eating and worshipping nature?

Or are they also new arrivals from some historical period, like the hill Brahmins (Upadhyayas and Jaisi) who entered the hills from Kannauj or Kumaon in India in the Middle

Ages? So, who are the ground-level castes and their realities that continue the real linguistic and cultural influence of that primitive Kirat-Videha civilisation of King Siradhvaj Janak in today's 21st-century Madhesh land?

Finding an objective answer to this question has become a challenging but essential requirement for today's history writing (Subba, 1999).

2. Historical position of the Maithili Brahmins (Jha, Thakur): ancient elite or mediaeval migrants?

To understand this curiosity from the beginning, we must first understand the historical chronology of the migration of the Hill Brahmins and the Madhesi (Maithil) Brahmins. It is necessary to examine it comparatively. The Khas Brahmins of the hills (e.g., Upadhyaya, Jaisi) originally entered the Karnali (Khas kingdom) and Gandaki regions of Nepal through Kumaon-Garhwal in western India in the mediaeval period (especially between the 12th and 14th centuries AD, when Muslim invasions of India intensified) (Bista, 1991). They are "historical migrants" who entered the mountainous geography relatively late.

However, the case of the Madhesi or Maithili Brahmins (Jha, Thakur, Mishra, etc.) is not at all like that of the Pahadi Brahmins. They are not new people who entered this region in the mediaeval period. Historical and genetic facts prove that the Maithili Brahmins were present in the northern Gangetic plains and the ancient Mithila region as early as 1000 BC. Historical evidence indicates the presence of an ancient Indo-Aryan population in the Northern Indian Gangetic region dating back to the Upanishadic and contemporary Kirat periods (Thapar, 1984). Their history with this soil dates back at least two to three thousand years.

Anthropological reality:

Although Maithil Brahmins have inhabited this region for thousands of years, they are not prehistoric, nature-worshipping 'indigenous people'. Rather, they are an ancient elite class that superimposed a Vedic veneer—a process of Sanskritisation—upon the local indigenous civilisation.

From an anthropological perspective, they have been familiar with the scriptures, script (Mithilakshara), Vedic rituals, and caste system of this region since ancient times. They remained the main conductor and policy-maker (Jha, 1971). Their highly classical culture never included 'snails'. They did not accept the primitive indigenous culture of collecting, offering pigs or goats in a mundhum manner or worshipping rocks under the open sky.

They are a clever and influential intellectual class that, as the power of the tribal kings grew in the Videha kingdom, entered their courts as priests and gradually 'Vedicised' the entire indigenous civilisation (Sharma, 2004). Therefore, although they are very old in Madhesh, they are not the pre-historic 'Bhumiputra Adivasis' born from the primordial womb of the earth.

3. Ghongi culture and the true native sons of Madhes

So, the question arises – who has kept alive the indigenous culture of eating snails, catching fish from the wetlands, and directly communicating with the soil that existed in the prehistoric foundation of Janakpurdham and the entire Mithila region to this day? However,

through an extensive study of the anthropology and the folk history, it is revealed that the Dalits, or “Ultimately Backward Class” in the contemporary society of Madhesh, have neglected such a primal tradition, and only the disadvantaged strata of the grassroots working community (often referred to as the indigenous tribes of the Terai) have kept alive such traits and customs (Dahal, 1985).

Native sons of Madhesh and their cultural work	
Caste / Community	Cultural / Environmental Work
Musahar (Sada)-->	Digging soil, collecting snails, enjoying wild tubers
Mallaha / Kewat (Majhi Group)-->	Digging soil, collecting snails, enjoying wild tubers
Dusadh (Paswan) / Chamar (Mahara)-->	Worshipper of the village goddess and 'Dehwar' (Tar Puja)
Tharu / Dhimal-->	Biological and linguistic bridge between Kirat and Terai

A. The relationship between the Musahar (Sada) community and the primordial soil

The Musahars are the oldest and most loyal sons of the land of Mithila Madhes. Every moment of their lives is directly connected to the soil. Digging the ground, sensing the moisture of the soil, and collecting snails from the fields and ponds during the rainy season. The original indigenous lifestyle of gathering and eating is still alive among them today. For them, ‘ghonghi’ (river snails) is not merely a food item; it is a prime example of a high-protein ecological adaptation—developed by their ancestors over thousands of years—to combat famine and natural disasters (Dahal, 1985).

B. Majhis (Sailors) and Kewats (Fishermen of the Terai)

The water culture of these communities—who fish, weave nets, and ferry people across rivers in bamboo boats within the gorges of indigenous rivers like the Koshi, Kamala, Bagmati, and Jalad—dates back to prehistoric times. Their folk songs and Mundhum narratives interpret the river as a manifestation of the divine and nature—a concept that predates the temple culture of established Hinduism (Majhi, 2015).

C. Dusadh (Paswan) and Chamar (Mahara) communities

They are the real craftsmen and working backbone of the Mithila civilisation. Even today, in the villages of Madhesh, the 'Dihawar' who guards the village borders and the 'Gram Devi' who resides in natural mounds are worshipped; the original priests (bhagats) of that worship historically belong to the Dusadh or Chamar caste (Jha, 1971). No Brahmin priest is invited to recite the mantra there. This shows that the underground religious power of Madhes is still secure in the hands of these Dalits and working-class people, who have a direct connection to ancient nature worship.

4. Kirat-Videha linguistic continuity: Anthropological evidence for Maithili 'native' words

Although the 'Maithil identity' (Bharopeli/Indo-European identity) dominates politically

and administratively in modern Janakpur today, these same low-castes of Madhesh continue to carry the linguistic influence of the ancient Kirat-Videh civilisation through their dialects. When we compare the refined, Sanskrit-influenced Maithili spoken by the elite class with the authentic Maithili spoken by Madhesi Dalits and rural labourers, a significant anthropological distinction emerges (Subba, 1999).

Maithili, spoken by rural Dalit and tribal communities, does not have the complex 'equivalent' words of Sanskrit like those of the upper castes (Jha, Thakur). Their language is called Deshaj. This contains an abundant number of terms. The sounds, pronunciation and roots of Deshaj terms are linguistically linked directly to the Kirat (Rai, Limbu) and Austro-Asiatic families of language spoken in eastern hills (Chatterji, 1951; Subba, 1999). Below are a few concrete examples that will bring out the relationship.

[Ancient Kirat/Tibeto-Burman]—► (Dialect Madhesi Dalits)—► [Maithili native words]	
	
- Tang / Tanga (weapon/staff) --> - Jak / Jhaak (vegetation/jhyang)--> - Chang (upper bamboo storey) --> - Husk (inner covering of grain)-->	----- Tang / Tangi ----- Jhaankhar / Jhaank ----- Changi / Chang ----- husk / husk-

Tang/Tangi: The rural Musahars or Mallahs of Madhesh call a wooden stick or khukuri-like weapon used to hang something in the village 'tang' or 'tangi'. This word is directly related to the Kirat Limbu language 'tang' (staff or head) and the Rai language 'tanga'.

Jhaankhar/Jhakh: The thick forest, thickets or small vegetation of the forest is still called 'jhaankhar' in typical Maithili. It has a deep linguistic connection with the word 'Jhakh' or 'Jhak', which is used to refer to the spirits of vegetation and forests in Kirat Mundhum nature worship.

Changi/Chang: In old houses in Madhesh, the upper floor made of bamboo and wood for storing grain or keeping things safe above the ground is called 'Chang' or 'Changi'. Linguists have concluded that this word migrated to the plains of the Terai during historical times from the 'Chang', which was built by the Kirats of the eastern hills in their traditional architecture for drying or storing grain (Subba, 1999).

Khoila/Khoili: The husk or inner covering of the corn kernel is called 'khoila' in the Maithili vernacular, which directly corresponds to the native tone of the Kirat Rai language, which refers to the husk of the grain.

Countless such linguistic examples prove that even though written history has changed the names, the tongues of the Musahar, Tharu, and Shilpi communities of Madhesh have preserved the linguistic heritage of the ancient Kirat-Videh civilisation with great care even today.

5. Cultural Repetition: Madhes' Nature Worship and Mundhum Kadi

The continuity of civilisation is clearly visible not only in the language but also in the traditional festivals and worship celebrated by the sub-castes of Madhes. Although Dashain,

Tihar and Chhath festivals are considered the core identity of Madhes in the established discourse of Hinduism, there are some original festivals of the indigenous and Dalit communities here, the outline of which is purely in line with the nature worship of the Kirat Mundhum. (Chemjong, 2003; Subba, 2025)l

Environmental awareness of Judshital and Siruva Pavain

At the beginning of Baisakh (the new year), the 'Judashital' festival is celebrated throughout Madhes, in which the elders of the family bless the children by sprinkling cold water on their heads and pour water on the old trees, plants and water wells of the village to make them cool. The Tharus and Dhimals of the Terai celebrate the 'Siruwa Pawain' festival at this time.

This festival is in stark contrast to the established Vedic Yajna or Fire Puja. It is a Terai adaptation of the Kirat Umbhaulti (worship of nature and water during the planting season) ritual, where gratitude is expressed to water and earth as the source of life (Rai, 2012; Subba, 2025).

[Kirant Mundhumi Umbhaulti]—(Shared Env. Philosophy) — [Madhes Judsital / Siruwa]	
	
- Worship of nature and land - Wishing for good health and life	----- offering water to trees, wells, and soil ----- Folk remedies to keep the head (spirit) cool

b. Village worship (Dihwar ritual)

For these groups of tribes i.e., the Musahar, Dusadh, and Chamar of the Madhesh, a "village puja" is conducted in their village once a year at the foot of the natural rise of earth or stone located in the border of the village, and at that time all the peoples of the village come together to sacrifice an animal, sing songs, etc. This type of puja is carried out in the open-air field, such as the 'Chotlung' Sthapana of the Limbuvan hills and the 'Sakela' Thana of the Rais (Subba, 2023). The fact that there are no images or human-shaped statues in this worship and that only the physical elements of nature are considered as power shows that even today, the intangible cultural link of the ancient Kirat-Videha civilisation still exists in the heart of Madhes. It is firmly rooted in the faith of these marginalised communities.

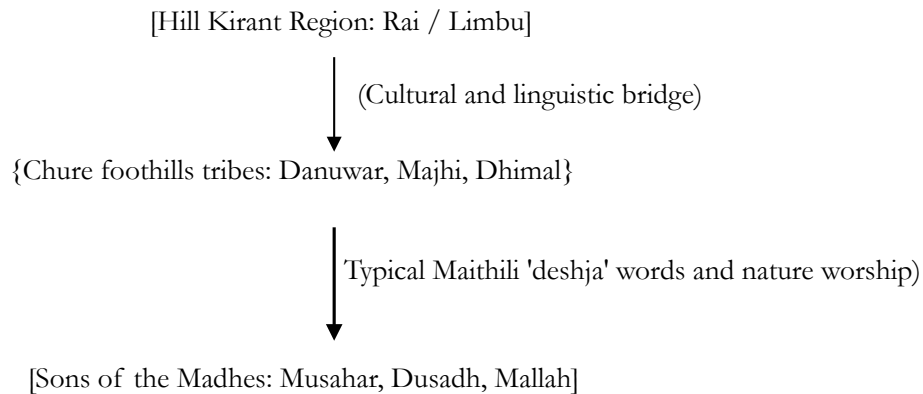
6. Valley-Fedi Bridge: Historical Role of Danuwar, Majhi, and Dhimal Communities

To keep the prehistoric Kirat heritage of Janakpurdham alive in the present-day landscape, the indigenous communities of the Inner Terai—situated between the flat plains of Madhesh and the Chure hills—are acting as a strong geo-cultural bridge (Dahal, 1985). These communities include the Danuwar, Majhi, Musahar, and Dhimal.

Geographically, the folklore history of the Danuwar and Majhi communities living in the Chure foothills and northern regions of Udayapur, Sindhuli and Saptari, just north of the borders of Janakpurdham, is directly linked to the indigenous forms of King Siradhwaaj Janak and Sita. In some of their indigenous songs and oral stories, Sita is sung as the daughter of her own

clan and Janak as the lord of the soil.

While these castes share their lineage and Mundhum bloodline with the Rai-Limbu of the hills, on the other hand, their food (Ghongi culture), indigenous vocabulary, and nature-worship methods are very similar to the Musahars and Dalits of Madhesh (Subba, 1999). Therefore, the Kirat influence in the Janakpur region is not a lost story of a single country; it is a continuous flow in the subsoil of Madhes even today, like the waves of the Kamala and Jalad rivers flowing from the foothills of Chure.



7. Conclusion: The balance of history and a new path to national identity

The final anthropological verdict: The contemporary Maithili Brahmins (Jha, Thakur) of Mithila are not recent immigrants into the Middle Ages' Janakpurdham and the land of Mithila; they are an old, long-settled Indo-Aryan tribe of this land, dwelling there for millennia. However, according to science and history, they are not the indigenous 'tribesmen' who dig the soil of the earth, collect snails from the rivers and practise primitive worship of nature (Chatterji, 1951; Thapar, 1984). They are a historical elite who have cast a glossy veil of Vedic veneer and Sanskritisation over local tribal civilisation.

In contrast, the real sons of the land, who eat snails, communicate directly with the soil, and carry the true biological, linguistic, and cultural heritage of the ancient Kirat-Videh civilisation in their tongues and sweat, are today's Madhesi Dalit, Musahar, Mallah, Tharu, and Shilpi communities (Dahal, 1985; Subba, 1999). They continue to keep this primitive history alive today through their daily 'native words' and 'nature worship' performed under the open sky.

It is both the greatest challenge and opportunity for the history writing and political system of modern Nepal today that we not only look at the history of the elite within the white marble architecture of the Janaki Temple but also give due recognition and respect to the intangible heritage of the indigenous Musahar, Dalit and Kirat ancestors buried beneath it. Only the development of this perspective will serve as a milestone in making our sense of history truly balanced, profound, just and relevant for the inclusive Nepal of tomorrow.

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Chapter 11: Natural Proximity and Mundhum Philosophy: Eco-Anthropological Dimensions of Eastern Nepal

1. Background and Theoretical Framework

Modern capitalist and colonial consciousness has placed nature and man in two separate categories. Western thinkers such as Francis Bacon and René Descartes interpreted nature as an inanimate machine to be consumed and controlled by man. This consumerist perspective is the result of today's global environmental crisis and climate change. However, the life vision of the indigenous Kirat community (Rai, Limbu, Yakkha, and Sunuwar) of eastern Nepal is completely different from this. Central to their entire life, social life, and religious thinking is the 'mundhum'. Mundhum is more than just a religion and story. Mundhum is a large ecophilosophy about human-nature-supernatural relations.

From an ecophilosophy and socioecology viewpoint, Mundhum philosophy does not treat nature as an object. It accepts nature as a conscious and living entity. Descola (2013) has explained the 'animism' of non-Western societies and established a social and moral relationship between humans and non-humans (plants, animals, rocks, and rivers). Kirat Mundhum is based on exactly this animistic and deep ecology, where humans are blood-related to rocks, soil, water, and vegetation.

2. Nature's creation and biodiversity in Mundhum

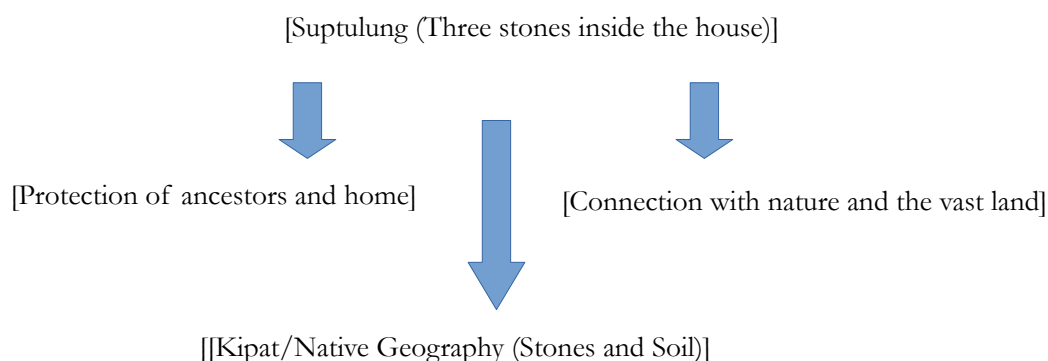
According to Mundhum cosmology, the primordial foundation of creation is nature. The story of the origin of the universe from nothingness and the gradual development of living beings through the combination of water, soil, air, and fire is found in Mundhum. The story of the primitive ancestors of 'Mujingna Khejingna', or Rai Mundhum, described in Limbu Mundhum, shows that trees, plants, rivers, and wild animals originated on this earth before humans. Respecting nature as the eldest child and being grateful to nature as the youngest child is the first condition of Mundhum ethics.

From an anthropological perspective, this narrative has laid a strong psychological and cultural foundation for the conservation of biodiversity in indigenous societies. Modern science has belatedly discovered that every living thing in an ecosystem is equally important, but the Mundhum has been teaching the culture of respecting every small insect to the largest wild animal for ages. The abodes of the Kirat ancestors and nature goddesses (such as Sumnima-Paruhang and Yuma Sammang) are not in grand temples or palaces but in dense forests, high mountain peaks, and the estuaries of sacred rivers.

3. The Sanctity of Stone and Soil: Place and Cultural Identity

In Kirat culture, 'stones and soil' are not just pieces of inanimate geography. They are witnesses to history and living relics of their ancestors. The heart of a Kirat home is the 'suptulung', or courtyard made of three stones. These three stones represent ancestors, nature,

and social relationships. There is an invisible cultural affinity between the stones of that small courtyard inside the house and the stones of the mountains or hills outside.



The connection with the soil is even deeper. They worship the land as ‘Khambek’ or ‘Maang’ (divine power). Great festivals like Udhauli and Umbhauli are fundamentally linked to the cycle of soil, grain and nature. In Umbhauli, land worship (Sakela/Sakewa/Tongsum Tongnam) is performed to ensure good crops and to prevent natural disasters, while in Udhauli, thanks are given to the earth and nature after the grain is brought in. This continuous dialogue between people and soil makes it clear that the identity of Indigenous people cannot be separated from the environment of the geography in which they live (Rai, 2020).

4. Mundhum Environmental Ethics and Traditional Natural Resource Management

Modern environmentalists are now shouting the slogan of ‘sustainable development’. But in the hills of eastern Nepal, the Kirats have been sustainably managing natural resources through Mundhum eco-ethics for centuries (Sharma, 2018). Mundhum has clear oral rules about what trees to cut, in what season to go to the forest, and in which caves or rivers not to litter.

Sammang and Cultural Taboo: According to the Mundhum, certain forests or water sources are inhabited by special ‘sammang’ (gods and goddesses or natural forces). These regions are guarded as “sacred groves” within which even dried wood is to not be touched, plucked, or chopped off. From an anthropological aspect, it's not superstition; however, it's an invincible indigenous system for managing biodiversity and catchments.

Animals, Killing, and Respect: Hunting Mundhum, the killing of wild animals, is done by Kirats asking for forgiveness from all nature gods after and before killing. According to Mundhum, pregnant wild animals and animals that are in certain seasons should not be killed at all. Animals can only be killed for consumption purposes, not as a sport.

In the present day, the indigenous ecosystem of the eastern part of Nepal is facing its crisis owing to globalisation, rapid deforestation, fast urbanisation and the state’s unidimensional policy of development.

5. Modernity, deforestation, and the crisis of global consciousness

In the present era, the indigenous ecology of eastern Nepal is in crisis due to globalisation, deforestation, rapid urbanisation, and the state's one-sided development policy.

With the end of the 'kipat' system based on collective ownership, the cultural relationship between land and people has been disrupted (Subba, 1999). When forests were considered only community or government property, people lost their spiritual sense towards them and started looking at them only from the perspective of economic profit.

The construction of hydroelectric projects on rivers and the destruction of Mundhum stones and ancestral tombs (graves) in the name of digging up mountains and building roads have led to an eco-anthropological crisis. When a Mundhum mountain or forest is destroyed, not only is the tree or stone destroyed, but an entire storehouse of oral history, language, and identity associated with it is lost forever. Due to increasing migration and the influence of modern education among the younger generation, the number of Mundhum Sambas (priests/gurus) who understand the language of nature is decreasing day by day (Srinivas, 1952).

6. Conclusion and contemporary relevance

The solution to the environmental crisis facing the world is no longer possible with just a few technical or economic policies. For this, a radical change in the way people view nature is needed. In such a situation, the Mundhum philosophy of eastern Nepal and its natural proximity can become a guide for the world.

The need of the day is to remove the modern lens that sees stones and soil as just stones and soil and to see them as the foundation of our ancestors and civilisation. This eco-anthropological dimension of the earth, which states that the existence of humanity is possible only by cooperating with nature and not by conquering nature, must be incorporated into the mainstream of modern indigenous knowledge and science without delay. Only then will we be able to leave this earth habitable for future generations.

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Chapter 12: Kipat, Culture and the State: A Political-Anthropology of the Indigenous Heritage of Eastern Nepal

1. Background and Theoretical Framework

The overarching question political anthropology asks is, 'What is the relation between territory and power, and how can it generate an identity?' When the state appropriates territory, not only is land taken, but also their indigenous managing systems and beliefs. The clash between the 'Kipat' system, which has been practised for centuries in the historical geography of eastern Nepal (Middle Kirat and Paleo-Kirat), and the policies of the modern Nepali state over it is a vivid example of this.

Kipat was not just a traditional land tenure or tax system. It was the backbone of the social organisation, the Mundhum culture, and the political autonomy of the indigenous Kirat community. As anthropologist James C. Scott (Scott, 2009) explained in his famous concept 'The Art of Not Being Governed', the indigenous people of the hill and Himalayan regions had developed their own autonomous socio-economic structures to escape the centralised control and taxation system of the state. The Kirat Kipat system was exactly such an autonomous folk-political model, where land ownership was vested in the entire clan and community, not in an individual or king. This article provides a political-anthropological analysis of how the state established political and legal hegemony over the cultural heritage of the indigenous people of eastern Nepal with the end of the Kipat system.

2. Political-anthropological structure of the Kipat system

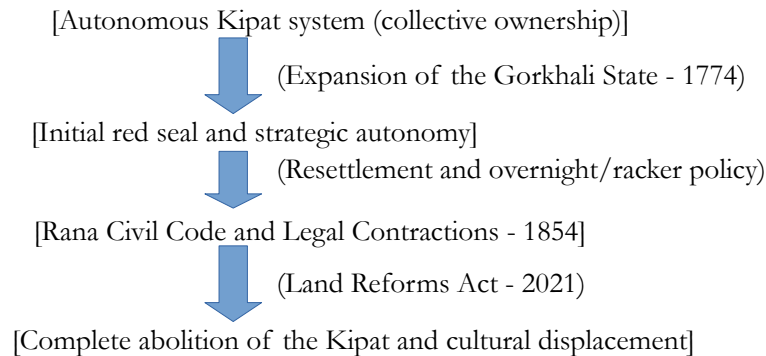
To understand the Kipat system, one must look at its cultural foundation. In Western legal consciousness, land is considered an inanimate commodity that is bought and sold, the ownership of which is registered in the name of an individual. But in the Kipat system, the relationship between land and people was linked by blood and ancestry. The forests, jungles, rivers, mountains and caves within the Kipat land were the abodes of the community's ancestors and deities (Subba, 1999).

Politically, the Kipat system gave the Kirats complete autonomy internally. The village Rai, Subba, or Dewan resolved local disputes themselves. Since the community had collective rights over the land, no one could sell their land to non-Kirats. This kept the area safe from the intrusion and cultural encroachment of outside communities for a long time. From an anthropological perspective, this system maintained a social balance where economic inequality was very low, and land use was within the bounds of Mundhum ethics (Sharma, 2018).

3. Expansion of the Gorkhali state and historical pressure on the Kipat

The expansion of the Gorkhali state under Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1831 B.S. (1774 AD) is a turning point in the political-anthropological history of eastern Nepal. The state initially promised to maintain the Kirats' Kipat rights through agreements (such as the historical

Lalmohars) with the Kirat rulers of Limbuwan and Majha. However, this was only a strategic move by the state, the aim of which was to quell the rebellion for the time being.



Over time, the state encouraged the migration of non-Kirat communities (especially the hill Hindu upper caste) onto Kipat land. The land policies implemented by the state, such as ‘Raikar’ and ‘Raitari’, gradually narrowed the Kipat’s circle. As the demographic dominance of other communities in Kipat land increased, the traditional political power of the Kirats began to weaken (Regmi, 1976). This process was not just a transformation of land; it was a state-directed plan to erode the political power and cultural dominance of the indigenous people.

4. The Civil Code (1854) and the Hinduisation of Cultural Heritage

Any political power uses legal and cultural weapons to maintain its dominance. The *Muluki Ain* issued by Jung Bahadur Rana in BS 1910 (1854) is one such powerful legal document in Nepali history, which reduced the entire country to a Hindu caste hierarchy.

This act classified non-Hindu indigenous peoples, including Kirats, as ‘Masinya’ and ‘Namasinya’ (Höfer, 2004). This legal classification had a direct impact on the cultural heritage of the indigenous peoples. The state came to control the sacred sites, sacred forests, and ancestral tombs that the Kirats had been observing. The state began to convert them into Hindu religious institutions.

For example, in eastern Nepal, traditional shrines where the Mundhum ritual of offering jand-alcohol and pig sacrifices was performed were appointed by Brahmin priests, and these shrines were Sanskritised as temples of Vishnu or Shiva (Srinivas, 1952). The indigenous people began to be considered ‘untouchable’ or ‘impure’ in their own ancestral heritage. This state policy forced many Kirats to adopt Hindu rituals (such as Dashain and Tihar) for their social and legal security, thereby diminishing their traditional cultural heritage.

5. Land Reforms Act (2021) and complete abolition of Kipat

The Land Act 2021 (1964), introduced during the Panchayat period, broke the shackles of the Kipat system forever. Under the nationalist slogan of ‘One Country, One Costume, One Language’, the state abolished all forms of customary and territorial land arrangements and brought land fully under survey and land revenue.

From an anthropological perspective, this legal end to Kipat was the biggest cause of cultural disintegration among the Kirats. When land became private property, ancestral burial

grounds, sacred groves of Sakela Than or Yuma Mang, came to be registered in the names of individuals. In some cases, these sacred sites were owned by non-Kirats, resulting in the loss of public and sacred spaces where indigenous people could perform their cultural rituals (Rai, 2018). The loss of land not only destroyed the economic base of the indigenous people but also broke the link in their Mundhum cosmovision that connected them to the soil and their ancestors.

6. Conclusion and contemporary political-anthropological discussion

Looking at the historical journey of eastern Nepal, it is clear that the relationship between Kipat, culture, and the state has always been conflictual. The state destroyed the Kipat system for the sake of land profits and administrative control, at the cost of which the indigenous people had to pay by losing their intangible cultural heritage.

In today's democratic and federal Nepal, the indigenous Kirats are engaged in rediscovering their lost heritage and identity. The political-anthropological debate should not be limited to just financial compensation for land. It should ensure the restoration of cultural autonomy, spiritual rights to the land, and indigenous knowledge of the indigenous people while understanding the pattern of historical discrimination in the state. Until this cultural pride associated with stone and soil is restored, the slogan of national unity of the state will always remain incomplete.

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Chapter 13: Diaspora and Mundhum: The Challenge of Identity and Cultural Transmission Caused by Migration

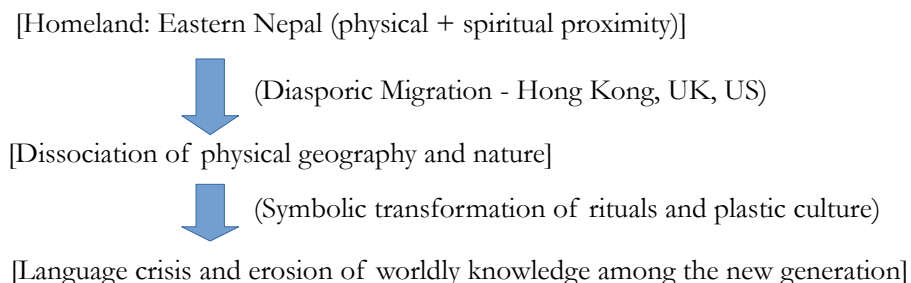
1. Background and Theoretical Framework

As old as the history of global migration and human migration is, the story of the transformation of intangible cultural heritage that is being transferred is equally complex. In anthropology, the term ‘diaspora’ refers to communities that have left their homeland and are scattered across different geographies of the world and are emotionally connected to their original culture. Migration is not a new phenomenon for the indigenous Kirat community of eastern Nepal, but the rapid migration to Hong Kong, Britain, America and the Gulf countries for employment, education and social security in the past few decades has created a new eco-cultural crisis in their worldly way of life.

Kirat Mundhum's identity and philosophy have a unique character—they are not physically tied to a distant imaginary paradise but to specific mountains, forests, river valleys, and ancestral tombs in eastern Nepal. According to anthropologist Stuart Hall (Hall, 1990), diasporic identity is not static; it is nurtured and transformed through the continuous dialogue of history, culture, and power. When a Kirat moves thousands of miles from his homeland (stone and soil) to the concrete cities of London or Hong Kong, his Mundhum consciousness is narrowed not only by geographical distance but also by the absence of nature. This article provides an anthropological analysis of how Mundhum cultures are shrinking or transforming into modern forms as they move away from their homeland and what challenges they face in their cultural transmission to new generations.

2. Lack of Native Geography and Mundhum Rituals in the Diaspora

Mundhum is not a written scripture but an ecological knowledge system that is orally alive. Each of its rituals requires a leaf of a native plant, a feather of a native bird, or a stone from a certain river (Rai, 2020). This is where the first and greatest material challenge in diasporic life arises.



Kirats living in London or New York do not have the same access to the open land, the original sour taste of Tongba, and the sacred Waplukma (native herbs or plants) as they do in eastern Nepal when dancing Sakela or Sakmura in Umbhauri or Udhauri. As a result, there has

been a ‘symbolic and compressed transformation’ of Mundhum rituals in the diaspora. For example, worship is performed on the floor of multiple halls or using plastic materials instead of real natural altars.

From an anthropological perspective, this transformation has helped keep the culture alive, but the core spirit of Mundhum—which is the organic connection with nature and the land—seems to be gradually being limited to ‘dance and performance’ (Subba, 1999).

3. Linguistic crisis and challenges to the transmission of oral traditions

The language of Mundhum is not just a common spoken language; it is an ancient, metaphorical and philosophical language recited by ‘Samba’ or ‘Pedangma’ (priests). This knowledge has been passed down from one generation to the next only orally. But the first language of the new generation growing up in the diaspora has become English or a local foreign language.

Due to the linguistic disconnect, the new generation of Kirat youth is unable to understand the deep philosophical verses and stories of Mundhum. When a language dies, the worldview that that language carries also disappears (Sharma, 2018). With the death of the elderly Sambas, the risk of losing a large part of Mundhum knowledge in the diaspora has increased forever. The new generation can walk in the Sakela lake, but they are finding it very difficult to understand the gratitude of nature and the story of the struggle of their ancestors hidden behind that lake. This is a huge anthropological crisis of cultural transmission.

4. Cultural Hybridity and Identity Reconstruction

According to Homi Bhabha’s (Bhabha, 1994) theory of ‘hybridity’ and ‘third space’, second and third generations living in the diaspora construct a new ‘hybrid’ identity from a blend of their ancestral culture and the foreign culture they grew up in. This trend is also evident among diasporic Kirat youth.

Today’s youth, instead of accepting Mundhum rituals at face value, seek rational and modern interpretations of them. In some cases, they have begun to present Mundhum philosophy through modern multimedia, pop music, and digital art. While this is a positive aspect, it also carries the risk of compromising the classical discipline of the original Mundhum and its religious depth. In diasporic societies, a subtle cultural conflict and identity crisis of ‘who is the real Kirat and who is the modern Kirat?’ always persists (Clifford, 1994).

5. Modern efforts to preserve the digital world and identity

Despite the challenges, the diasporic Kirat community is making interesting use of modern technology to preserve its identity. Just as migration has increased physical distance, digital technology and cyberspace have attempted to reduce it.

Kirat organisations scattered around the world are now conducting Mundhum recitation classes via Zoom and documenting Mundhum chants in text and audio format on YouTube and websites. A grandson living in London is trying to connect with his ancestral soil by watching a video of a Kulpuja held in a remote village in eastern Nepal. This ‘digital cultural transmission’

has erased geographical distances, but it cannot quench the primal thirst in the human heart to physically touch the native land, to communicate with stones and soil.

6. Conclusion

In this modern era of migration and diaspora, the continuity of the Mundhum philosophy and identity is at a critical juncture. While migration has made the indigenous people of eastern Nepal economically prosperous and global citizens, it has also disrupted the triangular relationship of 'stone, soil and Mundhum', which is considered the foundation of their cultural heritage.

The main challenge today is to communicate Mundhum to the new generation in the diaspora, not just as a festival or a dance but also as its eco-philosophical consciousness and outlook on life. For this, there is a need for written and digital archiving, as well as cultural campaigns such as Root Tourism, which directly connect the new generation with its ancestral homeland and soil from time to time. Only then will this primitive philosophy of nature be able to survive in its original form, no matter where it reaches in the world.

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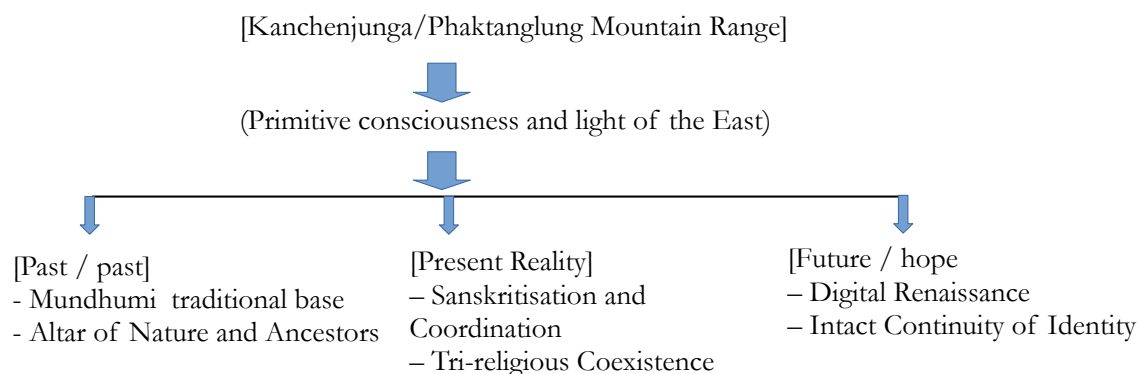
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Chapter 14. Final Synopsis: The Sun Always Rises from the East

1. Introduction: The Primitive Light and the Cultural Gravity of Eastern Geography

If we look at the geographical location and geo-cultural structure of Nepal, one natural truth comes to the fore very clearly—the eastern part of this earth is the first to be touched by the sun. More than just the start of a day, the morning's "first light", hitting the silver peaks of Kanchenjunga (Phaktanglung), is the consciousness of light falling onto an untouched landscape that's home to centuries-old indigenous practices and an emerging river of modern days.

These caves, rivers, mountains and plains of eastern Nepal are not just physical images or beautiful scenes that please the eye. In an anthropological sense, they are a mirror of the past, present and future of the indigenous peoples of this land and the cultures that have entered it over time (Sharma, 2004).



In previous chapters, we have elaborately discussed the Mundhum foundation of the worldly Maisthan in Rangeli, Morang; the tri-religious labyrinth seen in the Halesi Mahagufa in Khotang; the fierce struggle between corporate capitalism and indigenous identity (Kevalkar dispute) in Mukkumlung, Taplejung; and the Sanskritisation of King Siradhwa's Halo culture in Janakpurdham. All these separate chapters were actually different parts of one vast eastern civilisation.

Therefore, our aim in this final synthetic chapter is not to provide a description of any new place but rather to bring together all the research-based pieces that we have drawn academically yesterday and today into a single formula and create a comprehensive one and draw substantive anthropological conclusions. Come, readers! Let us delve into the heart of this Eastern civilization and understand how these diverse identities are strong pillars of the inclusive existence of tomorrow's Nepal.

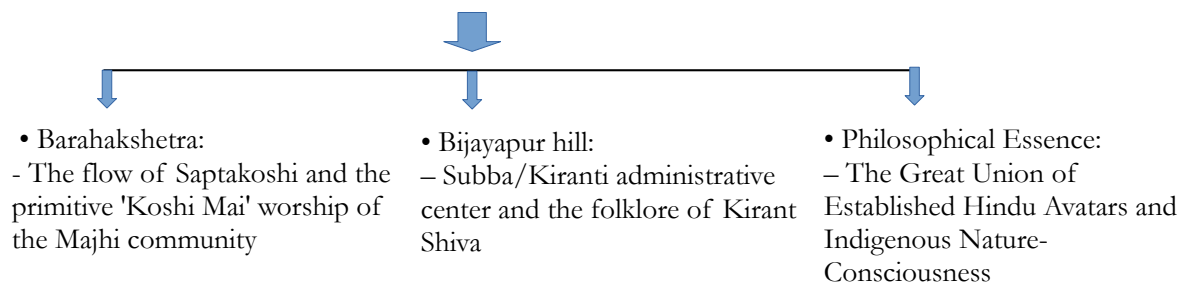
2. The peace of the hunter and the fierce power of the river: A combination of Barahakshetra and Bijayapur

The geo-cultural journey of eastern Nepal begins with the mighty flow of water and the

primaeval silence of the forests. Its strongest geological monument is Barahakshetra in the Sunsari district and the nearby historical hill Bijayapur. When seven glaciers, cutting through the Mahabharata mountain range, merge into Triveni and take the gigantic form of Saptakoshi, then a formidable physical force of nature emerges there.

In established Hindu mythology, this region is associated with the third incarnation of Lord Vishnu, who saved the earth from the swamps of the ocean by lifting it into his arms. (Jha, 1971). The connection between the river and this sacred spiritual land proves that there is a long-standing tradition of worshipping nature itself as a divine force (Sharma, 2004).

The geo-cultural foundation of Barahakshetra and Bijayapur



However, descending a little further, when we reach the Shital Kakh of Dharan and the historic heights of Bijayapur, we find a different kind of hunter's peace. (Tranquillity of the Hunter) Historically, Bijayapur was the administrative and cultural centre of the Eastern Kirat (Limbuwan) kings (Subba, 1999). The folk history of this place has a deeply woven story of Lord Shiva taking the form of a Kirat hunter (Kirateshwar Mahadev) and wandering in the forest.

This story is not just a coincidence; it shows how the indigenous forest ancestors of the mountains and the Vedic gods of the plains came to accept each other's existence and coexist in a single centre (Chemjong, 2003). In fact, this is not a history of one civilisation dominating another but a story of the rise of various communities together with understanding mutual interests and respect for each other's life and existence (Sharma, 2004).

3. The primal mother power that seeks and nurtures immortality: Halesi and Mukkumlung

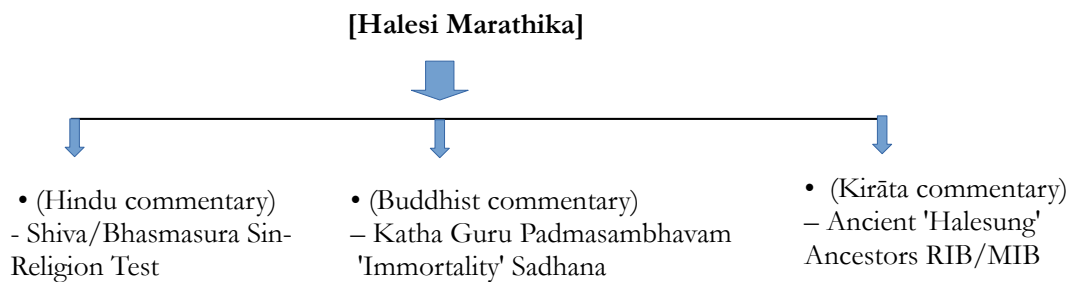
Further moving north from the middle ranges of Eastern Nepal and nearing the Himalayan lake, we find in Halesi and Mukkumlung two strong but separated forms of human consciousness – that of seeking immortality and life-bestowing mother, respectively.

A. Halesi Maratika: The Tri-Religious Labyrinth and the Laboratory of Immortality

The Halesi Mahagufa, located in the Khotang district, is a stunning natural limestone structure that presents a rare example in the religious history of the entire world (Buffetrille, 1994). For Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhists, it is 'Maratika' (the place of the abolition of death), where in the 8th century the great Guru Padmasambhava and Princess Mandarawa received the boon of immortality from Amitabha Buddha, the god of life (Ricard, 1994).

For Hindus, it is a sacred place of refuge where Lord Shiva hid to escape from the demon Bhasmasura and where Vishnu took the form of Mohini and killed the demon (Schöttli, 2014). And for the Rai-Kirats, the original sons of the land, this is the 'Halesung', the first womb of the land where their primitive ancestors Raibi and Maibi lived (Karki, 2018).

The early morning chanting of mantras by lamas, blowing of conch shells by Brahmins, and beating of drums by Kirat monks show that, even amidst the different stories, there is a unique blend of cultures in the world that seeks human peace and immortality (Gaudel, 2020).



B. Mukkumlung: Chotlung's Watchman and Capitalist Resistance

Mukkumlung (Pathibhara) peak: This is a great sacred hill having a height of 3794 metres in Taplejung. It signifies the gigantic strength and capability of the mothers in the Eastern Himalayas. For Hindu devotees, it is a great power-filled shrine like its pathi (Gaudel, 2020).

However, for the Yakthung (Limbu) community, this is the highest peak of their historical heritage, land rights, and spiritual self-respect, 'Chotlung' (Subba, 1999). Recently, the cable car project being built by corporate capitalists to make commercial profits on the top of this sacred mountain and the intense movement of local indigenous people against it are writing a new history. (Subba, 2023)l

Indeed, this opposition is not merely one to development but is anthropological – it is the rejection of the capitalist market in so far as it aims to reify "indigenous" nature-centric beliefs and biodiversity. Steep the climb was and arduous – as it would suggest that the struggle to retain our spiritual integrity is endless and that we forever struggle to get at the truth.

4. The indigenous knowledge of the plough and the steep staircase of the ancestors: A vision of Janakpurdham and Chotlung

This cultural map of eastern Nepal is set in a unique philosophical balance of the fertile soil of the Terai and the rocks of the mountains. On one side of it is Janakpurdham of Madhesh Province, and on the other side is the vision of the abstract 'Chotlung' of the Kirats (Pathak, 2012; Subba, 1999).

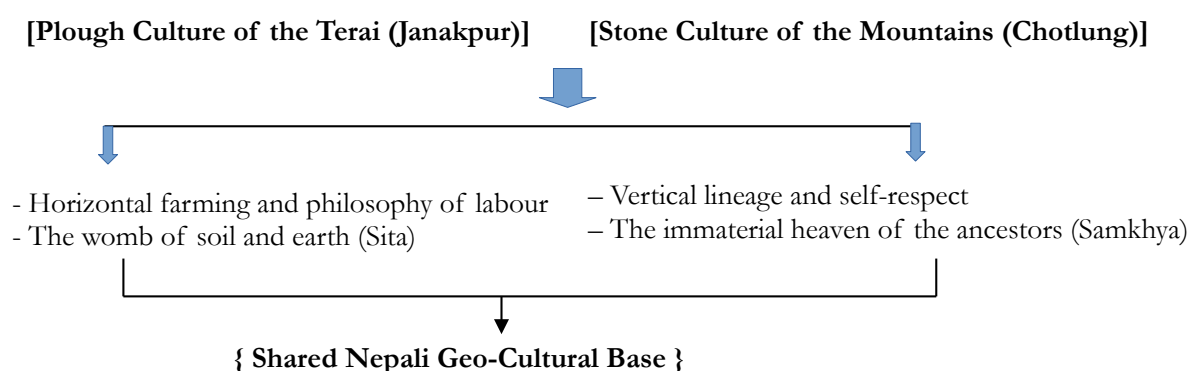
A. Janakpurdham: Ploughing culture and knowledge of the land

Janakpur is not just a city in the mythological Ramayana; it is basically the primitive 'Halo culture' of the Videha emperor King Siradhvaj Janak. Plough culture is a living monument

(Pathak, 2012). The meaning of 'Siradhvaj' is that it refers to the king who makes the plough the flag of his empire.

The fact that Sita (the line of the plough) appeared from the womb of the earth while he was ploughing for the yagya proves that true knowledge, opulence, and divinity lie not in some imaginary heaven, but rather in the soil of the earth and the humble labour of the farmer (Subba, 1999).

As we discussed in the previous chapter, today's Madhesi Dalit, Musahar and Tharu communities have preserved the true organic continuity of this prehistoric Kirat-Videh civilisation through the use of many Kirat 'native words' in their dialects (e.g., Tangi, Dabra, Chang) and nature-centred village worship. (Dahal, 1985). Inside the magnificent Rajput-Mughal architecture of the Janaki Temple and the famous Mithila art here (Mithila Art), even today, this thousands-year-old indigenous philosophy of soil and nature is clearly visible.



B. Chotlung Philosophy: Vertical Genealogy and Indigenous Psychology

In contrast to this horizontal agricultural subsistence of the Madhes, the spirituality of the Kirat people of the hills is completely vertical, whose highest form is 'Chotlung' (Sagant, 1996). In Mundhum philosophy, Chotlung is a spiritual pillar that keeps an individual's mental energy, self-confidence, and the collective self-respect of the lineage upright.

According to the new research findings of Dr. Nawa Raj Subba (2023, 2025), it's how essential this philosophy has been for the younger Kirat generation currently living outside their homeland in the current time; this philosophy serves as a primary psychological basis, the true mental fortress, to the younger ones. To safeguard against existential anxieties and mental ill health due to feeling so disoriented and alone in a far-away land.

Chotlung – A staircase that leads to the ancestors as they are on a path to visit the heavenly place (Samkha) after their demise (Sagant, 1996). This philosophy teaches us that no matter how high a person rises physically or spreads in the modern world, he should never forget his native name, ancestral history, and soil foundation for the advancement of his inner consciousness.

5. Comparative overview of cultural dimensions of Eastern Nepal

Through a deep anthropological study of all five of these historical and spiritual centres of eastern Nepal, their inner philosophical roots, established classical forms, and hidden

indigenous foundations can be summarised in this table:

S.No	Sacred site / identity Sacred site / identity Sacred site / identity	Established Classical Commentaries (Hindu/Buddhist)	Hidden Indigenous Land (Kirant/Mundhum)	Contemporary geo-cultural message /challenge
1	Barahakshetra and Bijayapur	Vishnu's Varaha avatar, Shiva's Kirateshwar form	'Koshi Mai' worship of the Majhi community, the administrative center of Limbuwan	A historic meeting point of established Hindu power and primitive nature-consciousness.
2	Halesi Marathika	The story of Shiva and Bhasmasura, the cultivation of immortality by Guru Padmasambhava	'Halesung', the ancestral homeland of the Rai-Kirants	A rare example of tri-religious coexistence and syncretic architecture in the world.
3	Mukkumlung (Pathibhara)	Powerful Hindu Shaktipeeth of Goddess Durga/Kali	The historical relics and collective 'Chotlung' of the Yakthung community	The front between neoliberal capitalism (justice) and indigenous environmental rights.
4	Janakpurdham	Maryada Purushottam Hindu Vaishnava Dham of Rama and Sita	Hello to King Siradhwaj, culture. Musahar/'Tharu native language	The philosophy that true knowledge and Lakshmi lie not in any mantra but in the soil of the earth and labor.
5	Chotlung philosophy	A concept that has been overlooked in the scriptures	A vertical natural rock that raises the morale (spirit) of an individual and a clan.	A traditional foundation for preserving the mental health of modern people in the era of globalisation.

6. Political-ecological transition and the diasporic mode: neo-anthropological dimensions

This geo-cultural and Mundhum heritage of eastern Nepal is currently undergoing a serious historical and modern transition. As we have discussed in previous chapters, this primitive relationship between indigenous identity and nature did not arrive here spontaneously; behind it lies a long political and ecological struggle for land rights. From a political anthropological perspective, the end of the traditional collective land ownership system of the Kirats of eastern Nepal, namely 'kipat', was the first departure point for this cultural transition (Subba, 1999). Starting after the expansion of Prithvi Narayan Shah's kingdom (1774 AD) and ending with the Rana-era Muluki Ain (1854) and the Panchayat-era Land Reform Act (2021), the unilateral laws of the state completely abolished the kpat system (Regmi, 1976). It was not just an administrative measure of land; this was the establishment of a centralised political hegemony of the state over the indigenous eco-ethics and spiritual rights linked to ancestral lands.

When land was treated as a commodity in the market, as eco-anthropology has pointed out, the organic dialogue between humans and nature, which Descola (2013) has called the 'animistic social bond' between humans and non-humans, broke down. The Mukkumlung-Kevalkar dispute, or the displacement of indigenous Mundhum altars around Varahakshetra, is a

continuation of this historical Sanskritisation and neoliberal capitalist plunder. This crisis over natural resources has not only destroyed forests and rocks but has also put the indigenous epistemology associated with them in jeopardy.

The geography of this crisis has now spread from the mountains of eastern Nepal to the global 'diaspora'. Kirats who have reached Hong Kong, Britain or America for employment and education are now physically thousands of miles away from the soil and stones of their homeland. As Stuart Hall's (Hall, 1990) theory of identity suggests, diasporic identity is always living in the balance between displacement and reconstruction. In the concrete foreign cities, the open land of eastern Nepal, the native taste of Tongba and the sacred vegetation (waplukma) required for Mundhum rituals are not found. As a result, Mundhum rituals in the diaspora have become separated from their physical nature and have begun to shrink into mere 'plastic culture' and stage performance.

In such a situation, the linguistic crisis seen in the new generation and the erosion of oral history have become the biggest challenges. However, amidst this despair, a pleasant 'digital renaissance' is also sprouting. As the studies of Dr. Nawa Raj Subba (2025) have shown, when modern man is struggling with loneliness and an identity crisis in this era of globalisation, then, the 'Chotlung philosophy' (the concept of a natural rock that raises the morale of the individual and the collective spirit of the lineage) described in the Mundhum appears as a strong 'mental anchor' for him. Today's diasporic youth is trying to reconnect with their primitive homeland and ancestral soil through cyberspace, Zoom classes and digital audio-video archiving. Therefore, this eco-cultural rediscovery of eastern Nepal proves that, despite historical state oppression and modern diasporic displacement, the Kirats' sense of place has an amazing resilience to protect and revive itself in new forms.

7. Conclusion: The unbroken continuity of the common heritage and the path to the future

We have examined several papers on the cultural geography of eastern Nepal one by one. One thing that has become clear from this long academic journey is that these diverse identities of eastern Nepal are not just decorative old ornaments or superficially beautiful scenes for tourist photos (Gaudel, 2020). These are the tallest dreams of achieving cultural unity, justice and prosperity in tomorrow's Nepal (Subba, 1999).

Rediscovering these indigenous cultural elements is the greatest academic responsibility of today to correct the old, one-sided history that views Nepal's cultural history only through a single Sanskrit or classical lens. (Sharma, 2004)l

[Tomorrow's Inclusive Nepal]	
	
(Respect for the past) - Mundhumi Oral History and - Preservation of indigenous heritage by valuing indigenous labor	(Departure towards the future) - Modern Technology (GPS/Digital Mapping) -

So long as the strong stones of Chotlung stand upright on the hills of these green mountains, so long as the songs of fishermen resound in the waves of Saptakoshi, so long as those native tongues of Videha civilisation still resonate in the tongues of Musahars and Dalits of Madhesh, this great common culture of Eastern Nepal will march forward. In each speck of this soil will forever reside the fragrance of the blood and sweat of our prehistoric ancestors.

Thus, the sun of consciousness and faith will never set in this sacred eastern land, which deeply cherishes its glorious history, upholds its indigenous identity and fights against the capitalist invasion and does advance with firm step towards a very bright future which is inclusive and shared. Sun is always rising in the East, and will keep illuminating the inner consciousness of the whole nation for ages.

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Author Introduction

A confluence of literature, music, public health, and anthropology: Dr. Nawaraj Subba's multifaceted intellectual legacy.

Dr. Nawaraj Subba is a name known for a rare blend of scientific rigour and tribal heart. His journey as a distinguished Nepali researcher-writer has spanned five decades of literary creation and 35 years of dedicated service in the Ministry of Health, Government of Nepal. With a PhD in Health Psychology and master's degrees in both Public Health and Nepali Literature, Dr. Subba has a unique dual perspective—where on one hand he analyses the modern human condition as an expert, and on the other hand he revives the ancient worldly wisdom of the Himalayas as a philosopher.



His work, which has made the cultural milieu of Biratnagar his work space, has served as an important bridge between the analytical demands of the 21st century and the primitive oral tradition of Mundhum. Whether diagnosing the “invisible pressures” of public health or composing patriotic songs, Dr. Subba’s contributions have always been rooted in the belief that the health of any nation is inextricably linked to its cultural identity.

1. Literary publications (more than 15 works published)

A Journey of Half a Century: A comprehensive poetic reflection on five decades of personal and national transition. Waking Up in the Middle: A collection of deeply symbolic poems that explores identity and human sensibilities. Dialogue Between the Sky and the Soul (2025): Philosophical prose exploring the relationship between consciousness and the infinite universe.

2. Anthropological work (published more than 13 works) He has published works including Kirat Mundhum, Yuma Mundhum, Tungdunge Mundhum, Sam Upma Mundhum, Kirat Limbu Culture, and the history of the Sen dynasty, Samba Phayang Vansavali.

3. Public Health and Behavioural Sciences (More than 9 works)

Drawing on 35 years of experience in the health sector, Dr. Subba has written on the psychological foundations of public health and social well-being.

Anxiety: The Invisible Pressure on Public Health: A critical analysis of the mental health crisis in modern Nepali society.

Healthy Behaviour (2024): A complete guide to health based on lifestyle and traditional knowledge.

Health-seeking behaviour of the Rajbanshi community: A basic study conducted in the field of medical anthropology.

4. Music and Communication: Timeless Rhythms (over 10 albums)

As an established lyricist, he has infused Nepali soft music and national songs with such philosophical depth that it directly touches the Nepali soul.

Love of the country and Nepali first: timeless songs imbued with the spirit of national unity and patriotism.

Hidden Desires: A brilliant presentation of the ghazal genre that expresses the hidden desires of the human heart.

Reflections Series: A visual and audio documentation of his musical and cultural journey.

The importance of his work today

On analysing the history of Nepal, one can see that the state has implemented a policy to create a unique cultural, linguistic and religious matrix that would be the only benchmark of the national identity. This method silenced and sidelined the indigenous philosophy, language and traditional land rights (the "Kipat" system) and cultural values of the Kirat communities of eastern Nepal. This state imposed structural intervention thus forcing the indigenous nationalities to live with a sense of alienation from their own cultural identities and histories in their ancestral lands.

So the quest for ruins and culture is not the quest for ancient ruins and culture that Dr. Navaraj Subba is seeking in this book, but an academic re-writing of a history deliberately marginalized by the state. He has given a new life to the indigenous philosophy of Mundhum and presented the living proof of history – 'stone and earth' – which the state sanctioned narrative tried to make disappear giving a great challenge to the linguistic and cultural hegemony of the then State power. Today it seems even more revolutionary and important as an alternative to the state-controlled history, attempting to asserts the identities of oppressed and marginalised communities and this is where his work seems more revolutionary and significant.

“The Stone, Soil and Mundhum” represents a special anthropological attempt to bring back the prehistoric indigenous spirit of the eastern part of Nepal which has been buried under the glossy surface of Kathmandu-oriented historiography and Sanskritization.

Dr. Nawa Raj Subba, a researcher and a cultural scholar, in this book, scientifically exposes the undisturbed, layered and colorful history of Eastern Nepal, which stretches from the fertile land of Madhes to the lofty mountain peaks of the Himalayas.

What is the underlying reality of the bitter rivalry between corporate capitalism and 'Chotlung' the highest expression of indigenous pride that is taking place at Taplejung's Mukkumlung (Pathibhara)?

How did this great cave of the Halesi (Halesung) in Khotang become a remarkable tripoly religion cave reflecting in both its ideas and philosophies Hinduism, Buddhism and Kirat traditions?

Is there any direct link between 'plough culture' of 'Videha' king Siradhwaja Janaka of Janakpurdham and 'ghonghi culture' of the Musahars of Madhesi Dalit and the Kirat hill folks?

Eco-anthropological dimension

Political-anthropological discourse

The concept of diasporic identity and digital renaissance.

This book reconsiders the historical record, from a linguistics, social anthropology, archaeology and modern genetic science (DNA markers) perspective. This book takes a new look at the historical record, from the perspective of linguistics, social anthropology, archaeology and modern genetic science (DNA markers). The book clearly shows the ancient bio-connectivity of Madhesh and the Hills, which has been consistently denied by politics by highlighting the indigenous Kirat words that still exist in the vernacular of Madhesi Dalit today.

This lively writing, with its academic profundity and narrative appeal is much more than a repository of old stories; it is a 'mental anchor' necessary to protect the mental health of young people who are living abroad in the modern context of globalization and is also a revolutionary manifesto for a national identity that is inclusive. "Dhunga, Mato ra Mundhum" (Stone, Soil, and Mundhum) is a hidden mirror of Eastern Nepal in which the whole of Nepal ought to view its own reflection—for the sun always rises from the East!

This book by Dr. Nawa Raj Subba represents an in-depth anthropological rediscovery of the soil of Eastern Nepal, the politics of the historical *Kipat* system, and the Kirat consciousness scattered across the diaspora.

The writer, in a scholarly way, discusses the way in which 'Chotlung Philosophy' can offer a good sense of mental stability for today's youth in the face of the concrete realities of living in a city such as London or Hong Kong where there are many coming up with a sense of identity and a feeling of loneliness. This is a book that should be collected by any reader interested in understanding the coming together of history, nature and modern life.

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